

SERMONS

PREACH'D UPON

Several Occasions.

BY

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Chaplain in Ordinary to his Majesty.

Never before Published.

L O N D O N,

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TO THE
MOST REVEREND
Father in GOD

THOMAS,

By Divine Providence,

*Lord Arch-Bishop of Canterbury,
Primate of all England, and
Metropolitan, and One of the
Lords of his Majesty's most Ho-
nourable Privy Council.*

May it Please Your Grace,

THAT the few follow-
ing Discourses may have
the Privilege of recom-
mending themselves to the World,
by the Honour of your Grace's
Protection. Of which how un-
deserving soever the Quality of
the Performance may be, yet the

A 2 Design,

The Epistle Dedicatory.

Design, I assure my self, is every way worthy a Patron of your Grace's Goodness and Character. For this is purely to enforce a serious and active Application of Mind to those Practical Duties of Religion, wherein the very Life and true Excellence of Christianity consists. In order hereunto, I have endeavoured to remove some of those false Pretences, whereby Men either suffer themselves to be diverted from the most necessary and useful parts of Religion, or are supported in a Wicked Course, or are apt to be discouraged in a Good One. And I hope, these Matters are (I am sure I intended they should be) stated in perfect Agreement with the Sense of that Church, which Your Grace, while in an inferior Station, did adorn with so conspicuous a Piety, Vigilance, and every

The Epistle Dedicatory.

every Pastoral Vertue ; and whereof the Good Providence of God hath now so deservedly advanced You to be the Common Spiritual Father.

But, Besides the Right Your Grace hath to the Work it self, You have also a very particular one to the Author. Whose Labours have been all along favoured with your Countenance and Encouragement ; and Who ever since your Promotion to the Episcopal Order, hath had the Happiness to live under Your Grace's Inspection, formerly in Your Diocesan, and now in Your Metropolitcal Capacity.

These, my Lord, are sufficient Inducements for my offering this Tribute of Gratitude and Filial Obedience: and will not suffer me to doubt the favorable Acceptance of a Publick Acknowledgment, upon

The Epistle Dedicatory.

so many Accounts your Due. In which I shall detain Your Grace no longer, than while I beg you to believe, that I esteem my self in a peculiar manner obliged (not only by my hearty Prayers to Almighty God, for his constant Blessing and extraordinary Assistance upon all Your Grace's Designs for the Good of his Church committed to your Charge, but) by every Instance of Reverence and Duty in my Power, to approve my self,

My LORD,

*Your Grace's most Obedient
Son and Servant,*

Geo. Stanhope.

P R E F A C E.

M^Y Reader had been spared the Trouble of a Preface, were it not that I think he may receive some Advantage towards profiting by the following Sermons, from having a short Scheme laid before him of my general Design, and of that Dependence which these Discourses, though composed at several times and upon very different Occasions, yet, as now connected in one Volume, have upon each other.

The End I proposed to my self was the the perswading Men to the diligent and constant Practice of Religion, by endeavouring to draw them off from such Courses and Opinions as seem more especially to obstruct or discourage it. And therefore the First Step I make is to shew the Serm. I.
Necessity and Usefulness of attending to
A ♣ the

The PREFACE.

- the plain Preceptive Parts of the Scripture, in Opposition to that wrangling and speculative Humour, so predominant in this Age; As if the Perfection of a Wise and Good Man were to be placed only in exalted Notions, deep Enquiries, and skill in dark and controverted Points. Which indeed are so far from making the generality of those who attend to them the better, that, one would almost be tempted to think by the modern way of managing these Matters, they scarce leave them the Spirit of Christians. Hence I proceed in the Second Sermon to explain the Measures of that Purity, which the Gospel requires in the Conversation of every one who would abandon a wicked Course in good earnest. For an Encouragement to which difficult Undertaking,*
- Serm. II.
- my Third treats of the Justice and Mercy of God, in distributing the Advantages of the Evangelical Dispensation, as our Lord hath represented them in the Parable of those Labourers, who were hired into the Vineyard at the Eleventh*
- Serm. III.
- Hour. But, being well aware withal, how perverse a Use might be made of that Parable, I esteem'd it my Duty, from the Instance of the Thief upon the Cross, to lay open those Cheats Men too frequently*
- Serm. IV.
- ly

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ly put upon themselves, by a false Application of such Encouragements, as the Scripture is supposed to allow a Late or Death-Bed Repentance. Hoping that these Considerations might be effectual for bringing my Reader to a Sight and serious Sense of the Necessity of a speedy Reformation; I thought the Frailty of Ser. V, VI. Humane Nature, and an Account of those Ingredients which make up a true Repentance, might follow very seasonably; which St. Peter's Fall and Recovery may serve for a convenient Illustration of. Moreover, in regard the Scriptures speak of a very remarkable Change, effected by the Spirit of God in our Hearts, which, by Reason of its Agent and Operation being invisible, hath been by Some exploded and denyed as a Fanciful Notion, by Others misinterpreted to the great hazard of Souls, for an Almighty, Necessary and Instantaneous Act; The Next Thing that seem'd requisite Serm. VII, VIII. was, to maintain the Certainty, to illustrate the Manner, and to shew the Priviledges and Conditions, of this spiritual Regeneration. In all which Argument the Truthows so much to the accurate Labours of a late learned and excellent Person of our own Church, that it is hard Dr. Clag,
Operations
of the Spi-
rit. for

The PREFACE.

for any Man who treats of this Subject after him, not to tread more closely in his Steps, than such as read more for Entertainment than Edification, are like to be very well contented with.

- Having thus led my Reader gradually to the Change from an Unregenerate, to the truly Christian State ; I thought it reasonable to consider some of those Difficulties, which might check his vigorous*
- Ser. IX, X. Advances in it. Among these the First are those erroneous Principles, which I have endeavoured to refute, by shewing the true Importance of the Parable of the Marriage Feast, and what Inferences may fairly be drawn from thence, for setting the Ordinary Methods of a Christian's Calling and Election in their true Light. And then from another Passage*
- Serm. XI. of the like Parable in St. Luke, I proceed to urge the Necessity of Religion, and a strict and constant Regard to it, upon the Men who plead Worldly Business and Lawful Cares, in excuse for their Neglect of Spiritual Duties. But some there are of a Complexion so different from those last mentioned, that they think they never have done, never can do*
- Serm. XII, enough ; Instead of following their honest*
XIII, XIV. Affairs, and indulging their unavoidable

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*voidable Infirmities, they sink under the Burden of Both; and imagine that they are lost, because not sufficiently Spiritua-
lized: Their Frailties and Imperfections they look upon as Marks of wanting true Grace and saving Faith: And, for mi-
nistring that Ease and Encouragement due to Persons thus disposed, I have con-
sidered at large, the Case of a Weak and Imperfect Faith, and the Scruples which are most usually observed to arise from it. Lastly, Since, in despite of all* Serm. XV.
*the Declarations to be found in Scrip-
ture of the Contrary, and of all the Rea-
sons resulting from the Natural Tendency of the Thing; Affliction is by some weak or carnal Minds reputed a constant Mark of God's Displeasure, and a Hindrance, rather than any Help, to a Christian's Obedience; I shut up this Volume with a View of our Blessed Lord's Resignation to his Heavenly Father's Will, and such Reflections drawn from thence, as may be both our Comfort and Direction under any Calamities, which it shall please God to lay upon us.*

This short Account is what I thought a seasonable Introduction, that the Reader might come a little prepared, and know

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know beforehand what he is to expect. In which, if, after all, he find himself at any time disappointed; I beg him to remember that he himself also is a Man; and that my Desire is rather to profit than to please all into whose Hands these Papers shall come. If they who peruse them are made better Christians, my Purpose is answered, and my Pains rewarded effectually. And to this best of all Effects, I most humbly beg of God, to render my poor Labours in some degree Successful.

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S E R.

SERMON I.
AGAINST
Unnecessary Curiosity
IN
Matters of Religion.

St. John XXI, 22.

*Jesus saith unto him; if I will that
he tarry till I come, what is that
to thee? Follow thou me.*

OUR Blessed Saviour, at the Eighteenth Verse, had signified to St. Peter, by what particular sort of Death he should glorify God. He, upon hearing his own Fate determin'd, enquires concerning St. John, the Author of this Gospel, how Christ intended to dispose of Him. But our Lord, not thinking fit to gratify his Curiosity in
B this

Against Unnecessary Curiosity

this Point, makes the Reply contained in my Text ; *Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee ? Follow thou me.*

The natural Importance of which Answer, is, no doubt, a Reproof to St. Peter's unnecessary Inquisitiveness into a Matter, which it no way concern'd him to know : And an Intimation withal, that the great and only thing he ought to be solicitous for, was to prepare himself for the Discharge of his own Duty. And, as Providence intended to liken him to his Master in the manner of his Death, so his Thoughts should be employed in taking good heed to be like him, in a meek, and patient, and constant suffering of the Tryals appointed for himself.

Now the Rebuke applyed here to one particular Instance, I shall so treat of at this time, as to render it an Admonition of general Use and Benefit. For such, no doubt, it may prove to every Christian, if we from this Example take the hint of forbearing to indulge all needless Curiosities in Matters of Religion : And, bending our Studies to those Objects which have a direct

direct Tendency to Practice and a good Life, lay aside such airy Speculations, as deservedly fall under this Reprehension of our Saviour; *If it be thus, or thus, what is that to thee?*

Now I would fain hope, That even in this busy and pretending Age of Ours, men might be prevailed upon, thus far to consult their own Ease and Benefit, would they but seriously consider these Three Arguments.

1. First, *That Many, if not Most, of the abstruse Points of Religion are beset with such Difficulties, as they cannot receive any positive and full Satisfaction in.*

2. Secondly, *That could they go to the bottom of all these Difficulties, yet such Knowledge would be of little, or no real use to them.*

3. Thirdly, *That the employing their Thoughts in such intricate Questions, is not only fruitless but dangerous; and many times of very fatal Consequence, to themselves, to others, and to Religion in general.*

This I shall endeavour to convince you, is ordinarily the Case of those nice and curious Persons, who spend their time and pains in the speculative

Against Unnecessary Curiosity

Parts of Religion: And not only so, but I shall urge withal, that the Study of the Practical and necessary Duties is the very Reverse of all this. That these are very possible to be attain'd; exceeding profitable when understood; and that all the Hours and Industry laid out upon them, turn to the truest, the best account, both for our Selves, and for the Publick.

I. *My first Discouragement against curious Speculations in Matters of Religion consists in this; that they are entangled with such Difficulties, as men cannot receive any positive and particular Satisfaction in.* And would not one choose of the two, rather to sit still and be idle, than to travel through Briars and Thorns, and after infinite Toil and Trouble, give out at last, heartily tired with one's Journey, but still as far from the End, as when he first set out? And yet this is the Consequence of those sublime Notions and subtle Distinctions, which have taken up the Thoughts, and employed the Pens, and swell'd the Volumes of a great many Learned Men in almost all, but especially in these later, Ages of the Church. The Mysterious Uni-
on

on of the Blessed Trinity, and that of two Natures in the Person of our Saviour Christ: The Secrets of Providence, and the Methods of Divine Grace; the State of Souls departed, and the particular Nature and Quality of those Rewards and Punishments, which await men in the next World. These, and abundance more such Points there are, in which the Scriptures have given us some general Insight, as much as is necessary for our present purpose. But when men, *not content to be wise according to that which is written*, plunge themselves into Controversies, about the particular Modes and Circumstances of them, the farther they wade, the more they are carried out of their Depth. And how should it be otherwise indeed? For when all is said and done, these are Subjects not of a size with us; our own Understanding is not qualified to fathom them. The Light from above is our only safe Guide in these matters: So far then as this leads us, we may go on boldly, and stand upon sure and firm ground; but where that Light forsakes us, all the Discoveries pretended to beyond, must needs be very

* Rom. I.
21, 22.

fanciful, and precarious, and weak. So full of Delusion are those very profound Contemplations, which lose the Mind in matters too high for it; so liable to that Reproach of St. Paul, * though in another Signification of the words; for *These men too becoming vain in their Imaginations, their foolish heart is darkned, and professing themselves to be wise, they become Fools.*

But now the most important part of Religion is of a quite different kind. For, those things which the Gospel commands to be believed, or done, in order to Salvation, lie level to every ordinary Capacity. Thus for Belief; It asks no mighty Depth, for a Man to convince himself, *that* what the God of Truth hath revealed, ought readily to be embraced; *that* He, who was pleased to declare his Will to Mankind, did certainly do it with a design to be understood; *that* therefore we ought to take his word in its plain and natural Sense, except where there appears manifest Reason to the contrary: *That* its containing some things which we cannot perfectly comprehend, (especially when treating of God's own Nature, and Operations)

is

is no good Argument of any Necessity, to take him otherwise. Because our Reason tells us, that God is infinite, and yet it tells us at the same time too, that infinite he could not be, if a finite Mind could fully comprehend him. In a word, it requires Modesty and Integrity, rather than Acuteness and Skill, to be satisfied, that the true and proper Foundation of Faith is, not the Quality or Perspicuity of the things revealed, but the Authority and Testimony of the Party revealing. These are matters that lie sufficiently fair and open to every considerate Person ; and They who come to the Scriptures with these Impressions, will find no difficulty in assenting to what they meet with there ; nor any occasion for flying to wretched Criticisms, as an Expedient for bringing down the loftiest Doctrines to their own narrow Apprehensions.

So again ; for the Moral Precepts of Piety, and Justice, and Charity, and Purity, and Meekness, and Patience, and Perseverance, and the like ; These are so suited to our natural Notions of God and Goodness, that, if a Man hath but once thrown off the dead weight

of his own Prejudices and corrupt Inclinations, they cannot but cast the Scale against the contrary Vices. Nor must I, upon this occasion, forget to put you in mind, that the Practice of Religion is a mighty Help to our more compleat Knowledge of it. It is so, as it engages our diligent Attention and fervent Love to that which is good. It is so, as it secures Probity of Mind, a teachable and impartial Disposition. It is so, as it entitles us to the Blessing of God upon our Studies: Whose Goodness will never suffer those who serve and seek him with their whole Heart, to continue in dangerous and fatal Mistakes. So manifest is the Advantage of applying our selves to this part of Religion, in which a Christian's proper Business lies; So possible, so certain, that all who do so, shall effectually improve by their Endeavours; So unalterable that Promise of him, who came to direct us in the right Way to Happiness, that

* *If any man will do his will, he shall not fail to know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God.*

* John.
WIL 17.

II. *Secondly*, My next Argument against indulging nice and curious Speculations

culations of this kind, is taken from the *Unprofitableness* of them. Our Lord, had he so pleased, could have informed St. Peter, what should become of this beloved Disciple: But he reproves his enquiring into it, because no Benefit was to be had by such Information. For so we may very reasonably interpret that Passage, *If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?* "How wilt thou be the better, "if I should tell thee what this Man "shall do? What Furtherance can it "prove to thy Preparation for following Me, to know whether he "shall be required to tread in the same "Steps"? And I cannot but think it would puzzle the wisest Man alive, to give a satisfactory account, what ends, of Consequence to our Everlasting Happiness, would be served, by being let into a clear and distinct View of all those dark, mysterious Truths, which are now in so great a degree lockt up from us; or how Religion would, upon those Terms, be in a better State than now it is.

Let us put the Case in one or two of these Instances already mentioned, *that* the Trinity of Persons in Unity
of

Against Unnecessary Curiosity

of the Divine Essence, and the Incarnation of the Son of God were fully understood by us. I desire to know now, whether this would at all promote our Zeal in the Love and Service of God; or what one Argument we should then have, which at present we have not, for being better Men, or more thankful Christians. The true ground of our Reverence and Fear, our Love and Trust in God, is a due Sense of his Holiness and Wisdom, his Power, and Justice, and Goodness. And what dependence, I beseech you, have our Notions of these Attributes, upon our knowing how God is *Three in One*? The proper Motives to a Christian Life are Gratitude, and a just Regard to the adorable Mystery of Man's Redemption; the Mercy of having our Sins pardoned, and satisfied for; the Rewards proposed to our sincere Obedience, the terrible Punishments of obstinate Offenders, and the little Reason we have to flatter our selves with hopes of *escaping, if we neglect so great Salvation*? Now these Affections spring from our considering the infinite Kindness and Condescension of the Son of God, who

Heb. II. 3.

who humbled himself to do so many wonderful, and to suffer so many bitter, things for our Sakes. But the Mercy of his doing and enduring these things in Nature, will not touch our hearts one whit the more tenderly, for discerning how this Nature of Ours was united to his Divine Nature. It is the thing's being done, and not the particular manner by which it was done, that must have this Effect upon us. So likewise for the rest; The Influences of Divine Grace would not be more prevalent, nor is Their Condemnation, who stifle and resist them, less deserved; because we see not all the Springs, by which the Holy Spirit moves and bends us. It is sufficient, that he acts as he does, to render both our Obedience possible, and our Obstinacy inexcusable. The Considerations fitted to contain men in their Duty, are the Greatness and the Certainty of the Punishments threatned to wicked Livers: As, on the other hand, the powerful Incentives to doing and suffering with Constancy what God appoints us to, are the Excellence and the Assurance of a future Recompence. But, if the being warn'd in so solemn
and

and exprefs a manner as we are, that Torments everlasting and extream remain for the Ungodly, will not restrain us from being ſuch our ſelves; neither would we be reſtrained, though God had told us, whether that Torment be material Fire, or whether it be ſuch, as for the exquisite and inſupportable Anguiſh of it, was thought convenient to be repreſented to us by Everlaſting Burnings. If we will not be perſwaded to *live and die unto the Lord*, by theſe ſupporting Reflections, that *the Sufferings of this preſent time are not worthy to be compared with the Glory that ſhall be revealed in us*, and, that it neither hath entred nor can enter *into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for them that love him*; What additional Force could theſe Reflections poſſibly receive, by our being acquainted, wherein each Excellence of that Glory, and theſe Joys conſiſts? For ſtill the ſame Temptations to Sin and Infidelity, would continue: And They who reſuſe to take God's Word for the Greatneſs and the Certainty of future Rewards and Punishments, (which are the only Qualifications neceſſary to quicken

Rom. VIII.
18.

I Cor. II.
9.

quicken us in our Duty) would not have wanted any one Objection, which they now pretend to urge, against whatever God should have revealed concerning the Nature and Quality of those Rewards and Punishments. If men shall be Happy or Miserable for ever, and as Happy or Miserable as they are capable of being; it matters not much after what manner they shall be so: That they shall be so at all, depends upon the Will of God, that they believe they shall be so, is from an Assent to the Word of God, declaring that Will. And if the Revelation of God find no Credit, as to these things in general, there is but little appearance; that it would have gained more Credit, had he described the whole Process, and descended to every Circumstance of these things: For the Truth and Declaration of God being the only Motive of Assent common to both these Cases; it unavoidably follows, that there would be the same reason for withholding it in the One, that there can possibly be in the Other.

Nay, shall I carry this Point a little higher? I may do it; and dare appeal to all that hear me, whether in the
Judgment

Judgment of every considerate and unprejudic'd Christian, it be not for the Dignity and Advantage of Religion, that some Articles of it exceed the largest humane Comprehension. Whether we should entertain the same awful Impressions of the Divine Majesty, if the Perfections of his Nature and Operations were such only, as we could see to the end of, and in every respect account to our Reason for. Whether it do not raise the value of Man's Redemption, to have been brought about by Miracles of Mercy, not only without Example, but even beyond our present Understanding. Had all these things been less, we should have known them better ; but so much as you abate of them to bring them nearer to Mens Capacity, so much you weaken the Power of them upon their Affections. And the influencing mens Affections, is the direct and great Business of Religion : For These are the Springs that move us, and according as They are set higher or lower, we shall be sure to act with more or less Vigour. It is therefore, in Reality, the very Commendation and Excellence of these Doctrines, that they are
so

so far above us ; because the height and greatness of the Subject is more serviceable to the ends they were designed to promote, than their being obvious and intelligible throughout, could possibly have rendred them. We should esteem it an instance of the Divine Goodness no less than Wisdom, so to have tempered his Revelations, that we want no Knowledge fit to engage our Piety, and holy Wonder ; and yet we have not so much, as should destroy our Humility and Reverence. In a Word, both the Light which is allowed us, and that which is denied us, if a right use be made of both, do mutually conspire to carry on the Advantage of Religion. And we have reason to believe, it could not have been better ; nay, probably not near so well, if either less had been discovered to us, or less concealed from us.

So small Improvement is there to be had from bold and busy Intrusions into those Secrets, which God hath, like *the Ark of old*, forbidden to be seen. But now a diligent Attendance upon the plain Preceptive parts of the Christian Institution, This brings in vast and present Profit, such as grows every day

day upon our hands, and approves it self to all the World, by its visible and excellent Effects. For This hath a direct Influence upon the Dispositions and Manners of Men, corrects depraved Nature, and cultivates those Virtues, which contribute to our own Perfection, and the Good of Others. This puts us upon making our Light shine before men, by filling the Post Providence hath placed us in. It secures a diligent and faithful Regard to those several Capacities and Relations, in the satisfying whereof not only the Peace and Happiness of the World, but the good Pleasure of God, and the Duty of each Person's particular Calling consists. And God, who is a Lover of men, thinks himself much better served, when we become useful, and publick Blessings to the Age we live in, than by the most refined Knowledge, and rapturous Contemplation: These, at the best, are but Personal and solitary Excellencies, and contribute little or nothing to the Common good: From hence, I presume, it is, that St. Paul prefers * *Charity* before *the Gift of Prophecy*, and understanding *all mysteries and all knowledge*; assuring us
at

* Cor.
XIII. 1.

III. *Thirdly*, Such Speculations are not only uselefs, but *extreamly dangerous too, and many times of very dreadful Consequence To the Persons employed in them; To others, and To Religion in general.*

1. *The Persons themselves* suffer by them, in being taken off from more useful and important Subjects: For the Difficulty of these devours their time, engrosses their Thoughts, and leaves them neither Leisure nor Inclination for attending to the plainer and weightier Matters of the Law. The Knowledge of our Duty, 'tis true, may be brought within a small compass, but the Practice of it requires all our time and pains. Passions and Lusts

Lusts are not subdued in an Instant; and the Attacks of Temptation come on so thick, that our constant Watchfulness and utmost Care is no more than needs. They who employ themselves, as they ought, upon these Occasions, will find that Providence hath cut them out Work enough for their whole Lives. And were there no other Inconvenience attending these nice Speculations, yet this alone, is too much in all Conscience, that they rob those men of a great portion of their time, who have no time to spare. The Knowledge of these will make no Article in our last great Account, and is what we may be very good Christians without; but the practical Precepts are expressly given us in charge, and will be sure to be strictly reckon'd for: These are so many Branches of the *One thing necessary*, and all is lost, if we suffer any thing else to come in between, and take That away from us.

But further yet, Such Curiosity does not only divert our more vigorous pursuit after Vertue, but it tinctures the Mind very strongly with several sorts of Vice. Hence the Apostle takes notice of a * *Knowledge which puffeth up,*

* 1 Cor.
VIII. 2.

up, and sets this in Opposition to *Charity*, which *edifieth*: And in another place, he describes the Consequence of not being content to rest in the plain *wholesome words of our Lord Jesus Christ*, by saying, * That such Persons are ^{*1 Tim. VI.} proud, knowing nothing, but doting about Questions and Strifes of words, whereof cometh Envy, Strife, Railings, Evil Surmisings, Perverse Disputings of men of corrupt minds. And this is likewise but too visible, that such men grow immoderately fond of some peculiar Notions, by which they affect to distinguish themselves: This engages them in Controversy, which sows their Temper, and sharpens their Pens, and makes the Contention as hot and fierce, as if in these Quarrels too, that false Punctilio of fantastick Honour were to take place, never to acknowledge Satisfaction, till they have drawn Blood of their Adversary. All which, as it is of infinite ill Consequence to themselves, so is it

2. *Secondly*, Matter of mighty Scandal to Others. For Standers-by, though they ought not to do so, yet if they be ill disposed, they will be but too apt to cover their own Irreligion with

Against Unnecessary Curiosity

the pretence of vehement Disputes, and indecent Heats about Religion; to fall into Scepticism and universal doubting, when they find men so eager in Differences, wherein, if others cannot form a clear Judgment, it is not to be wondred at. And such, as all People are never like to be brought to one mind about, while the World endures: Nay, even Good men cannot but lament and be displeased, to see such intemperate Admirers of Singularity and Distinctions, lose Charity and Moderation, the very Life and Substance of Religion, while they are contending for the Subtleties of the Schools, which are in comparison but as thin Air, and empty Shadows. And it would really move ones Indignation, that men should have the Vanity to imagine, they do any true Service to the Cause of God and Religion, by an ungovern'd Fervour, which seems to be little or not at all concern'd, what becomes of Humanity and Justice, good Nature or good Manners, provided the Writer can but acquire to himself the Reputation of Smartness, and Subtlety, and Skill. And can there happen a greater Calamity, not only to
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the Persons thus corrupted and seduced, but, which is worst of all,

3. *Thirdly, To the Christian Institution in general*, than to be thus unfairly dealt by? To have the Excellence of the Gospel falsely placed, in Matters wherein the Power and Essence of Godliness does not at all consist? Can there be any Course more destructive to sound Religion, than to represent it as a meer Science; as if men were better or worse, in proportion to what they *know*, and not in proportion to what they *do*? And do not our Eyes plainly see the ill Effect of pretending to these lofty Speculations? Are not men a thousand times more intent upon the Disputes between contending Parties, than they are upon the Practice of that which all Parties agree to be necessary? Do not even the Vulgar now a days, the People of every Age and Sex, and Condition, take an Estimate of their own Improvements, by what they are able to say for, or against, some difficult and warmly debated Points; rather than by the Conformity of their Lives to the plain and indispensable Duties? And whence all this, but from an itch of being

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Against Unnecessary Curiosity

thought might Reasoners, ignorant of none, not even the darkeſt and deepeſt Myſteries of Chriſt? And this Vanity is followed cloſe at the heels by a nauſeating of the moſt valuable and profitable Parts of Religion; for that every thing, wherein the true Worth and Advantage of them lies: I mean, the honeſt Plainneſs of all neceſſary Doctrines, and, that God hath not required Artifice, and Skill, and a great reach of Parts, but hath qualified the Simplicity of Babes, a common Capacity, aſſiſted with conſcientious Induſtry, for working out Salvation. And how perverſe a humour is this, which thinks nothing worth its Study, which does not give it Trouble? Whereas, in truth, it is with our ſpiritual, as with our natural Food, That affords us beſt Nouriſhment, which is eaſieſt of Diſteſtion; and the Man grows in both Reſpects, not by trying the Strength of his Stomach, but by the Health and Vigour, which proceeds from Exerciſe and Suſtenance duly diſtributed: For ſearch the Bible throughout, and you ſhall not find there ſo much as One ſingle Promise made to Knowledge, abſtracted from Practice: Action is that
which

which must crown all our Studies ; and what our Saviour said to his Disciples, is true of every Christian, and of every Branch of Divinity ; not *Happy are ye if ye know these things,* but * *if we know these things, happy* ^{*Joh. XIII 17.} *are ye if ye do them.*

I am sensible much more might have been said to this purpose, but at present, I only beg leave to draw two or three Inferences from this Discourse, and so conclude.

I. And *First*, It is no hard matter from hence to discover, upon what occasions the study of sublime and controverted Points in Religion, is useful and adviseable. It is not to repose our Confidence in, as the *Gnosticks* of old did, who made great account of their boasted Illuminations, though at the same time they allowed themselves in the most beastly Impurities. It is not to expose or overthrow the Mysteries of the Christian Faith ; to foment Differences, and blow the Coals of Contention, by forming Parties and Factions, as *Hereticks* and *Schismaticks* do. It is not to feed our Vanity and Ostentation, to play Prizes in Divinity, and make wanton Flourishes of

Subtlety and Wit, as the *School-men* too often seem to have done. It is not to disparage plain practical Knowledge, as if men were wiser, when they choose to shew their Dexterity, by treading out new Paths, than when they travel in the beaten Road to Heaven. It is not, in a word, from *Choice*, but from *Necessity*, that these things should be labour'd in. And this is a *Necessity*, which conceited Smatterers, or crafty Enemies of Religion lay upon Some, to qualify themselves for countermining them. For God forbid, that the *Stewards of the Mysteries of Christ* should stand by tamely, and look on in silence, while they that hate the Truth are at work, to take away the Ground from under them, upon which their Faith and Hope are built. These men must consider the Charge committed to their Trust, and be prepared, not only with Integrity and Zeal, but with Penetration and Skill. For the best Cause will suffer, if they who undertake it, are not provided with a just Defence; And this Defence cannot be made, without being Masters of the same with their Adversaries, that so they may detect

detect their false Reasonings, put them out of their Play, and foil them at their own Weapon. It were, no doubt, much happier for You, and Us, and all the World, that we had nothing else to attend to, but only to perswade our People to their respective Duties, and explain to them the Methods, how they may best *adorn the Doctrine of our God and Saviour in all things* : Greatly to be wished, that the differing Interests and Opinions of Christians were so composed, as to leave no occasion ; Or, if that cannot be, yet that Petulant and Licentious Tongues and Pens were so effectually restrained, as never to give any just Provocation for such Disputes : For the less of these there is, the better to be sure it is, not only for the Churches Peace, but for the Quiet and good Government of the State too. We must be provided with Arms, because we are listed in the publick Service ; but we shall do well to remember, by whose Commission we act, and never use those Arms, but when our Master's Honour and Religion are in Danger.

2. *Secondly*, Let me prevail on you for this most reasonable Request, That
from

from the Uncertainty of some abstruse Points in Religion, you *would not make any Conclusions to the prejudice of Religion in general.* Though inexplicable Difficulties may lie on both sides of some Questions, this does not hinder the Authority of easy and uncontestable Truths. And, though Some, that enter the Lists upon these Occasions, may lay about them madly, like Fencers in the dark, and cut and gash one another without Mercy; yet be assured, there are such Vertues, as Meekness and Christian Charity in the World. It is a general Rule in all Arts and Sciences, to make those things that are Plain, a Foundation and Introduction to those that are Obscure: But no where, I think, except in Religion, have men ever been so fantastical and absurd, as to deny and cast off all regard to things that are Plain, for the sake of those that are Obscure. This is just as if an undisciplin'd Reader should reject all *Euclid's* Axioms, because he finds himself unable to demonstrate every *Proposition* in his Book. There is not any one of our pert Disputers against *Jesus* and *Divine Revelation*, but would think it a Reproach upon

upon his understanding, to treat any other Author, at the rate he does the inspired Writers of Holy Scripture. When therefore men are loosen'd in their Principles of Religion, upon such poor and frivolous accounts, as would not be allowed sufficient to shake the Principles of any other Science (such particularly, as Learned Mens differing in their Judgment about some difficult Points of it) This is but too plain a Discovery, that something else is cast into the Scale, besides the real Merits of the Cause: And that such People cavil at Religion, not because they have Reason to think it is not true; but because they wish it were not, and apprehend it for their Ease and Interest, that it should not be, true.

3. *Lastly*, I cannot upon this occasion, forbid my self addressing to you, the Members of our established Church in particular, most earnestly beseeching you, to *consider the Privileges you enjoy, and to make a right Improvement of them.* You have not the Word of Truth lock'd up from you in an unknown Tongue, nor are prohibited to use it freely. You are permitted, entreated, commanded to
peruse

peruse it diligently : And we are very sure, the more you do so, the more *ready* you will be to give a *reason of the hope that is in you*, and the less liable to be driven *about by every blast of Doctrine*. Let me only beg, that, along with this Diligence, you would bring Meekness and Modesty, an honest Disposition, and godly Fear : That you would reflect very seriously upon the End for which God hath thus imparted his Will to Mankind, which is not to entertain so much as to edify men ; to *make them wise* indeed, but *wise unto Salvation*. And consequently, that keeping constantly this end in view, and avoiding intricate and unseasonable Questions, which the Apostle tells us, do but *ingender strife*, and perplex the minds of the unwary, stick close to those plain profitable passages, which may stand you in good stead at the last great Day of Account ; Such as may excite your Piety, enflame your Devotion, reform your Manners, and render you useful and exemplary in your respective Stations and Capacities ; Such as may bring advantage to the Publick, by reducing and mortifying all those unruly Passions

sions and Affections, which obstruct Peace and Order, Charity and Justice. For be very confident, that He who lives best, does in the Christian Sense know most; And every one of competent Parts and Industry may know enough for these purposes. *God hath* * Micah. *shewed thee, O man, what is good; and* VI. 8. *what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? This is a short and a plain Lesson, and yet even this well learnt, would not fail to bring us all to Heaven. I shut up all with two memorable Passages of Moses and the Son of Sirach, to this purpose, The Former in the XXIXth of Deuteronomy at the last Verse, Secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us, and unto our Children for ever; that we may do all the words of this Law. The Latter in Ecclus. III. 21, &c. Seek not out the things that are too hard for thee, neither search the things that are above thy strength. But what is commanded thee think thereupon with Reverence, for it is not needful for thee to see with thine Eyes the things that be in secret, Be not curious in unnecessary matters; for more things*

30 *Against Unnecessary Curiosity, &c.*

things are shewed unto thee, than Men understand. For many are deceived by their own vain opinion, and an evil Suspicion hath overthrowed their Judgment. Without Eyes thou shalt want light, profess not therefore the knowledge that thou hast not. This wholesome Advice God gives us all the Grace to follow, that we may receive the Truth in the Spirit of Meekness, and obey it in the Love thereof, for Jesus Christ his Sake. To whom with the Father and Holy Spirit, Three Persons and One God, be all Honour and Glory, now and for evermore. Amen.

SERMON

SERMON II.

THE HOLINESS

Required in a
Christian's Conversation.

Ephes. V. 11.

*Have no fellowship with the un-
fruitful Works of Darkness.*

GREAT part of this Epistle, and particularly this Chapter, is employ'd, in urging the Advantages these *Ephesians* had receiv'd, by being converted to Christianity; and the Improvements it was expected they should make of them. To this purpose the Apostle advises them * *to walk as Children of Light*, To * Verf. 8, *prove what is the good and acceptable* 9, 10.
Will

Will of the Lord, and in order to their doing so, to shake hands with their old Corruptions, and have no Fellowship with the unfruitful Works of Darknes.

In treating of these Words, I design to speak to these four following Particulars.

I. I will shew, *What those things are, which the Apostle here commands us to avoid, under this detestable Title. The Works of Darknes.*

II. *What it is to have no fellowship with them.*

III. I shall press the Reason for avoiding those Works, which the Text hath couched, by calling them unfruitful, and then

IV. *I shall apply my self from the whole, to the persuading every one of us, to act like men duly convinc'd of the former Heads, and the Engagements that lie upon us with regard to them.*

I. I shall shew, What those things are, which the Apostle here commands us to avoid, under the detestable Title, *The works of Darknes.* And here it is fit I put you in mind, that
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all sins indeed, of what nature or Quality soever, are such Works; and that we are absolutely forbidden any kindness for, and Intimacy with them all. For, whether by Darkness we understand Ignorance and Error, or whether those Regions of horror inhabited by Devils and damned Spirits, the Title will very properly belong to them in both respects. Every Sin is owing in some measure to a defect in the mind, and wrong Apprehensions of things; Every one leads to those dismal Regions of Death; Every one derives it self from the Prince of Darkness, and is originally his Work. But, because even of sins there are differences to be made, both as to the degree, and as to the malignity of them; since some do more manifestly carry the Character and Features of that old Serpent, whose Spawn they are; I will just mention some few, which seem by way of Eminence to challenge this Title. Now, Of These Some were more peculiar to the Pagan World, and such as St. *Paul* had an immediate respect to in this Chapter, particularly that Idolatrous and Polluted Worship, and all those vain Superstitions;

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perstitions, which even the wisest, and most Learned Heathens had submitted themselves to. And Others of them are such, as do even now, notwithstanding all the Light and Advantages of Christianity, endanger mens Souls, and draw them into a Resemblance of the Devil, whose qualities they are. Such especially are Pride and Ambition, Envy and Malice, Lying and Dissimulation, Faction and Treachery, and the Tempting others to Sin: For under these Qualities the Devil is represented in Scripture, and the Devilish Nature of these Vices is sufficiently manifested, as soon as they are named. So that without further enlarging upon so odious a Subject, I shall think my self now at liberty to descend to my

II. *Second Particular*, which was designed to enquire, *What it is to have no fellowship with these works of Darknes.* And here I can by no means think it proper, to put the avoiding the Commission of the grossest Sins, much less contracting the habits of them, into this account. For to call the Insolent and Haughty, the Uncharitable and Censorious, the Contentious and the Slanderer, the man that repines

repines at Good, and triumphs in misery and mischief; that disguises himself, and deceives and betrays others; to call Him, I say, only a *Partaker* in Wickedness; To allow the zealous Advocates for Sin, and busy Factors of the Devil, them who make it their Business to put Vertue and Religion out of Countenance, to corrupt all they converse with, and carry on his Trade here upon Earth, I say, To allow such Wretches as these so gentle a Name, as men that *have Fellowship* with Works of Darkness; is to shew a great deal more Civility to Vice, than becomes us. This were to give too much Reputation to Sin, by softening the worst of Practices, and representing them to the World, under such extenuating Terms. It is necessary the Works of Darkness shou'd have no Veil drawn before them, but be expos'd to the View of Mankind in their true Colours; and that every one shou'd be made thoroughly sensible, whose business he carries on, and what he is doing, and how great a guilt he contracts, when he indulges himself in any of those Abominations. And therefore I shall now proceed to tell

you, what other Instances of forsaking such Corruptions the Apostle must in all reason be acknowledged to require here; and that none of us can answer the Character of *Children of Light*, unless, to the avoiding the Pollution of such Lusts in our own Persons, we do likewise add these following Particulars.

I. *First, The declining, as much as may be, the Acquaintance and intimate Conversation of notorious and scandalously wicked men.* The Infection of Sin is so rank and spreading, and we in so constant a Disposition to receive it, that no Caution, when prudently us'd, can be too great in this Particular. * The Scriptures have compared vicious Company to *Pitch upon the Clothes*, and *Fire in the Bosom*. And the general Censures, even of men discreet and tender, are apt to bring the Keepers of it under an odious Character. Which abundantly justifies the Comparisons; and argues the universal consent of Reason in the extrem danger of such Conversation. The same Discoveries of our Love and Hatred, which Nature and Passion put us upon in Other Cases, must

* Ecclus.
XIII. 1.

Prov. VI.
27.

must be the Work of Reason and Religion in This. And they who industriously place themselves in the way of Temptation, seem to have but a very imperfect Sense of their own Frailties, or else not to have weaned their Inclinations sufficiently from the Lusts they affect such Familiarity with. For, when we cannot be personally intimate with the Devil himself, the next degree of Friendship we can possibly shew for him, is to be fond of conversing with those who are most like him themselves, and whose Examples naturally tend to make others like him too. What Philosophers tell us of some Creatures, that they frequently change their Colour, according to the Stones or Plants their Bodies rest upon; must always be admitted by thinking Persons to be a very lively Emblem of the minds of men. For these ever receive a strong Tincture from the Persons they frequent, and are insensibly form'd into Their Appetites and Opinions; Their Language and Their Manners. And therefore such persons must not think they are ill used, if both God and Good Men condemn those approaches

to Sin, as sure Arguments of a secret kindness for it, and sad Presages of a dying Zeal for the Honour of Religion, and their own Safety.

Mistake me not, I beseech you, I am not here recommending such a surpercilious Pride, as we find the Pharisees upon all Occasions guilty of, such as shou'd teach men to distinguish themselves from the rest of the World, with a *Stand off, I am holier than Thou*. No: The Detestation of other People's Vices must always be so temper'd, as not to produce a disdain for their persons, nor may we so far consider them as Sinners, as to forget that they are Men. All that I am now advising, is only the necessary Care for our own Preservation; And, where the Offices of Charity, and the Courtesies of the World do not endanger our own Souls (as indeed they very seldom do, if managed with any competent degree of discretion) there we have a pattern in our Blessed Saviour himself, who, for the sake of doing good, was content to eat, and to drink with Harlots and Publicanes and Sinners.

But still That Example of His, and All that can be said to support and
coun-

countenance the frequenting of bad Company, will never be able to persuade holy and considering men, that they ought to mingle Friendships with all indifferently, and to keep no guard at all upon themselves, in the midst of a very crooked and perverse Generation. It gives too much encouragement to Vice, to make it no part of our Aversion; and puts our own welfare upon too desperate a hazard, to court that distemper, which if once caught, may end in Death eternal. It shews, that we think very little of the horror of Sin, or the deadly creeping Qualities by which it steals into our Souls, when we are loath to be kept at a distance from it; and upon such poor pretences, as either the Forms of Civility, or a false Confidence in our own Strength and Wisdom, are us'd to furnish us with, delight to dwell within the reach of its Infection. This is in effect to throw dry Stubble into the Fire, to commit a Body full of ill Humours to the mercy of a raging Pestilence; For such in truth is the Venemous nature of all Vice, and in such constant readiness are our hearts to catch and suck it in.

The Holiness required

But yet the same Apostle, who forbids all *fellowship with the works of darkness* here, and all scandalous Conversation in the Vth of his 1st Epistle to the *Corinthians*; was so sensible of the universal Corruption of that time and People, that he acknowledges, to avoid vicious Company altogether, a Man must even go out of the World. And therefore, since the Tares and Wheat must stand together till the general Harvest, and the condition of the present Life does of necessity infer a mixture of Good and bad men in the same common Field of the Church; After the due Care already mention'd to preserve our selves from being tainted by this mixture, The Next thing I presume necessary, and imply'd in St. Paul's Command here, is This,

2. Secondly, That *those persons, who cannot be wholly declin'd, may never be approved, or have their wickedness favoured by us.* After a long Description of the Abominations of the Heathen World, this is added as a very high Aggravation of all the rest, * *That they who knew the Judgments of God, and how worthy of death the Committers*
of

* Rom. I.
32.

of such things were, not only did the same, but consented with or took pleasure in those that did them. This was an Argument, that when such men sinned, it was not so much through the strength of passion, and the Violence of an over-bearing Temptation; as out of a settled and fixed Judgment, that had debauched their Understandings, and reconciled them to the blackest, and most unnatural Offences. And however we may, for some secret Reasons, endeavour to avoid the Commission and Habits of Vice in our own Persons; yet if we can, with Delight and Complacency, behold the same thing in another, there cannot be a shrewder sign, that our Aversions to sin are not so strong, nor grounded upon so true and sound Principles as they should be. For a just Sense of Christianity will beget in us a perfect Antipathy to Sin, wherever we find it; and to profess a hatred of it in our own case, and yet be very well reconcil'd to it in another Man's; to see it acted with Satisfaction, or hear it related with Relish and Delight, does certainly betray a hidden Reserve of Kindness in its favour, and that
our

our Understandings are either but ill convinc'd, or else we perverted and byass'd in our Affections concerning it.

This Zeal for God and goodness, and indignation against evil and ungodly Practices, is so considerable an Ingredient in a Holy Man's Character, that St. Peter has left it upon Record, as an eminent Commendation of just Lot's Righteousness; That he was afflicted continually with the filthy Conversation of the Wicked. For (says he)

* 2 Epist.

3. c. v. 7,
8.

* That righteous man dwelling among them in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul, from day to day, with their unlawful deeds. Thus David professes of himself, *

* Psal. 119.

It grieveth me when I see the Transgressors; and again, Mine eyes gush out with water, because men keep not thy Law. And indeed, if the common Rules of Honour require the vindicating of a Friend's Reputation, the men who pretend to govern themselves by those Rules, wou'd do well to remember how unbecoming it is, patiently to see God and Religion, the best Friends and the best things abus'd and traduc'd; How tame and cold this argues all that profess Love, or Value for either.

Now

Now the open and shameless Wickedness of mens Lives are the greatest disgrace to both. He that keeps himself from this, may be allowed prudent and tender of his own Reputation ; but if he gives it any countenance in another, he must not be esteemed truly religious. For a zealous and good Conscience can never be Friends with Wickedness, nor pleas'd with it at any rate, nor endure it with ease on any account, or in any person whatsoever.

3. *Thirdly*, As a manifest Proof, that the *works of darkness* have no countenance from us, I think it another part of our Duty, *to Rebuke them, when that can be properly done.* I add this necessary Limitation, *when that can be properly done*, because there is no one good Office either of a Friend, or a Christian, that requires more cautious and deliberate proceeding, than This of Admonition and Reproof. It is not the business of every Man, nor of every Time, but requires fit Persons, and favourable Seasons ; and is attended with a thousand Niceries, which, if not punctually observ'd, may defeat the best Intentions,
and

and render the kindest Advices, not only Ineffectual, but Offensive too. For, tho' Christianity require this necessary check upon Vice, yet it no where obliges any body to break through the Rules of Civility and Prudence ; It preserves all those Respects entire, which must needs follow upon the different Orders, and Conditions of men in the World : It gives no Licence to Sawciness, and Ill Manners, under the pretence of holy Indignation, and Zeal. And therefore, when I urge the rebuking these *works of darkness*, as a Testimony of our *having no fellowship with them*, All those Qualifications are to be understood, which may make such Rebukes, both becoming, and successful. And though we are dispens'd with, for giving that *which is holy to the dogs*, That is Our good Advice to such as we have cause to believe will *trample it under foot, and turn again and rent us* ; yet where Authority and Opportunity call upon us, where any hope of prevailing to a better Reformation shews it self ; there we must not think our selves at liberty, so much as to be silent. Not to dislike, is then to consent

sent and approve: And God, and Truth, and Vertue, have all a right to our Vindication of them. And sure the least we can possibly do, is not to contribute to the disgrace of those things, that shou'd be (and to every good man are) beyond comparison, the dearest of any in the World.

4. *Fourthly*, To disclaim fellowship with the works of darkness, effectually, we must avoid all occasions of, and Tendencies towards them. There are infinite Accidents in a Man's Life, in which many things may offer themselves, though not strictly Unlawful, yet exceeding Dangerous to be comply'd with. Such are a number of those that naturally occur in the matters of Temperance, and Chastity; and in All other Cases, where the question concerns the indulging such Passions, and Desires, and Pleasures, as are not in their own nature sinful; but only offend, according to the measures, or some other Circumstances, that attend the gratifying of them. Now the generality of People on these Occasions, are willing to give themselves all the liberty that possibly they can; and rather

ther choose to hazard the falling into something that shou'd not be done, than to abridge themselves of any thing that may be done. But This is perhaps one of the most destructive Courses in the World ; And the more so, becauses it imposes upon many seemingly good persons in their Judgments of themselves ; and is apt to persuade them all must needs be well, so long as they can take Sanctuary in this Testimony of their Consciences, that they do not allow themselves in any thing, which is positively and in its own nature sinful. But alas ! They who consider the Constitution of Humane Nature, and the subtle Methods of our Tempting Adversary ; by what an easy descent we are carried down to Hell ; how gentle and insinuating the Allurements and Steps to Wickedness are ; and how insensibly the Fort of our Souls is betray'd, when the Pleasures of Sense have laid Reason to sleep, when the Spirits flow gayly, and the Guards of severe Thoughts, and strict Religion are over-powered by them ; (all which happens even in the most lawful Enjoyments sometimes) They who observe these things,
I say,

I say, These wise and good men will soon discern the necessity of Self-denial; how convenient it is to exercise that Virtue betimes, and not to give our selves the utmost stretch we may. For certainly it becomes every man that is serious in the Business of Salvation, to be as safe as possibly he can: Not only to ruine himself, but to be upon his guard against all Hazards of Ruine. And it was not a hard, but a prudent and needful Commandment, which St. Paul has left us; to *abstain from the very appearance of Evil.* They I Thess. v. 22. who profess to hate the thing it self, and to repent of it, and to forsake it; and yet wou'd fain be doing what looks like it, and leads to it, cannot escape this Censure at least, of *being Lovers of pleasure more than Lovers of God.* This comes from a perpetual hankering after their Lusts, and shews that they wou'd fain accommodate the matter between Christ and the Devil. They endeavour to divide themselves as equally as may be, Not to be wicked for fear of danger, but yet to be as near wicked as they can too, for Love of Pleasure. And like treacherous and poor-spirited men, who in a disputed

puted Title, act for one Prince to serve their own Ends, and are secretly in the Interests of another to humour their Inclination ; so these men carry it between Vertue and Vice. They have a secret Affection for the one ; and yet they must stifle this Affection, because it cannot be to their advantage to own and pursue it publickly. But still their hearts are ever treacherous, ever bending to the wrong side ; and the bottom of all their pretended Quarrel with Sin, is not so Much for its being a *Work of Darkness*, as for its being an *Unfruitful Work*.

5. *Fifthly and Lastly* ; The thing, which contains, and which must perfect all the rest, is what the Apostle urges in the End of this Verse, *Reproving those Works* : I mean by the constant Tenure of a pious and exemplary Conversation. For that is the Reproof he means there. The exposing them by this means to the World, and discovering all the Horrour and Deformity of them. The Shortness of our Capacities, and the intricate Natures of things make it necessary for us, to advance in Knowledge by the help of Comparisons ; And the quickest way

way to it, is by setting Opposite Qualities before our eyes at once to contemplate both, and so to discern the difference between them. Now as none are more Contrary, so none do more manifestly illustrate each other, than Vertue and Vice; which are therefore very elegantly represented by the Apostle here, under the two most distant and irreconcilable Figures of *Light* and *Darkness*. But all the Life, and Efficacy of this Representation depends upon the Practice. It is not a plausible declaiming against the One, nor the most elegant Harangue in Praise of the Other, that can sufficiently recommend This, or condemn That. Because, though the Characters be never so just, yet Words are but matter of form, and may be employed upon any subject, for private respects, contrary to the inward and real Sense of the Speaker. But the Esteem which comes to Religion by a good Life cannot be counterfeit. These Actions of a Man prove themselves, and shew the power of Godliness upon the Soul. And in such a Case, none is so blind, but he sees the Beauties of Holiness; how it shines

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and

and sheds its Rays like the Sun ; not only to the delight, but the benefit and warmth of all that are within the Sphere of its Activity ; What a foil the contrary Vices are to it, how black and dismal, how ugly and crooked they look, when brought to this Light ; and set against the streight and uniform, the sweet and charming Excellencies of Religion. This comes home to the meanest Understandings, and supplies the place of all the Eloquence in the World. It convinces where nothing else can enter ; It is a sort of mechanical Reason, without the studied Methods of Rhetorick and Argument ; and will not fail to draw, where those cannot so much as move. This is therefore the peculiar advantage of a holy Life, to check and discountenance Sin ; to shew it in its true and worst Colours, and not only to receive Lustre from, but to reflect it back again upon Vertue and Religion.

From what has been delivered in these Particulars, we see the true extent of the Apostle's Command, and our Duty with regard to it ; How false those men are to God and Religion, who content themselves with avoiding the grossest

grossest and foulest Offences, if in the mean while they indulge their Lusts, and expose their Souls to the Snares of evil Company; If they retain any secret Fondness for Sin, and can so much as with ease or patience, see or hear what is so; If they are so tame and cold in the Cause of God and Religion, as not boldly and sharply to rebuke Vice, where that can be prudently and seasonably done; If they still halt between Vertue and Vice, and are so fond of the thing, as to sport upon the very confines of it; and shew that their proceeding no further, is more the effect of Interest, and Necessity, than sincere Piety and Choice; and lastly, If their Example do any way countenance it, and not rather display its Deformity, and deceitful Disguises; and, by representing Godliness in all its Lustre, render that more inviting, and lovely; and Sin more odious to the World. Those who do not endeavour all this are not entirely devoted to Christ, nor true Children of Light; but have still a Tenderness for, and hold a private Correspondence with *the Works of Darknes*. And how destructive such double
E 2 dealing

dealing will be in the End, how reasonable our Aversions to those Works are, and all, even the most severe, proofs, that can be required to demonstrate the truth of our Hatred, and to make good our Engagements against them; I hope will soon appear to you, by a brief consideration of my Third Particular, *viz.*

III. The reason of avoiding these *works of Darknes*, which the Text hath couched here, by calling them *Unfruitful*. It is not without great Elegance, and particular good reasons, that the Lusts and Practices of Sinners are so frequently in Scripture styl'd *Works*; for This implies the Toil and Drudgery of them, and intimates to us, what sad experience wou'd teach too late, that no man can be very wicked, without much Labour, and great Vexation. The distracting Cares and Interests of Ambition and Covetousness; the Violence and Tyranny of raging Passions, and inordinate Desires; which hurry men into Anger, and Revenge, and Injustice, and Uncleaness, and all manner of Excess, cannot but be inconsistent with ease and pleasure. For they impose more mercilefs

ciless Tasks upon a man, and put him upon more dangerous, and more extravagant Attempts, than the most arbitrary Tyrant, or the Cruellest Enemy, cou'd invent for his Captive, or his Slave. And he that has once resign'd up the Government of himself to the furious and wild Suggestions of the Tempter, and his own rebellious Appetites, must make no more Pretensions to Freedom and Satisfaction; He has bid adieu to all that can give him any, and does in the highest sense of the words verify our Lord's observation. * *Whosoever committeth Sin is the Servant of Sin.* * Joh. VIII. 34.

And how hard a service that must needs be, I leave every one to judge, when he finds it describ'd * *by a dark and slippery path; by mens wearying themselves to work iniquity, walking through dangerous places; and labouring in the very fire.* * Wisd. V. 7. Jerem. IX. 5. Habak. II. 13.

If such then be the Pains and Wearisomness; If such the Hazards and Difficulties, that attend the *Work*, it will become us very seriously to consider, what it is we lay our selves out upon; and whether the Profits will at last answer the trouble: And of

*Habak. II.

13.

Isaiah LV.

2.

This too, the Scriptures give us a true, but a lamentable account; * by assuring us, that such men *weary themselves for vanity, and a thing of nought, that they spend their labour for that which satisfieth not; that their years are consumed in trouble; and all their works unfruitful.*

And what a miserable thing is this now? For a man to look back upon a life, so ill, so uneasily spent; and find it turn to no advantage at all? To reflect what crooked and rough paths he has travelled through, what a deal of Sweat and Strength it has cost him, to obey the Commands of a Master, who will never consider him for his pains? How often his mind has been tortured and perplexed with unlawful desires, and anxious fears; How he has been rackt to gratify his Lust, or his Pride, his Avarice or Revenge; How he has sacrificed all his content and calmness of mind, all his rest and quiet enjoyment of himself and the world to these Passions; and when he comes at last to sit down, and Compute his gains, to find that all his hopes have been deceitful, and all his Labours vain; And, instead of such a Summ as might recompence

compence his past sufferings, to find that Sarcasm of St. Paul's underwritten at the foot of the Account; and his conscience, after being long deluded with the expectations of I know not what imaginary Happiness, turn again upon him with a * *What fruit have you had in all these things?* or those words of the Preacher, *What profit hath he that laboureth for the Wind?* * Rom. VI. 21.
Ecclef. V. 16.

This renders the Case bad enough in reason, and puts the Folly of such, as employ themselves in *Works of Darknes*, past all Question, and beyond all Excuse. And therefore to men, who have not abandon'd all Consideration, it is discouragement enough in conscience to call them *Unfruitful*. Not that they are strictly without any fruit, but because what follows upon them, is a great deal worse than if there were none at all, and therefore said to be *none*, because it brings no advantage. For the Holy Spirit has foretold expressly elsewhere, what will be the end of all such labours. * *That Woe shall be to him who enticeth his Neighbour to Sin; That Envy is the Rottenness of the bones.* * Habak. II. 16.
Prov. XIV. 30.

Ecclef. IV, Covetousness and Ambition a perpetual
 V, VI. *vanity and Vexation.* That Pride goes
 Chap. before Destruction. And in more ge-
 Prov. XVI. neral terms still. That *they who sow to*
 18. *the flesh, shall of the flesh reap Corruption.*
 Gal. VI. 8. That to *wilful Sinners there remains a*
 Heb. X. 27. *certain fearful looking for of Judgment*
and fiery Indignation. That the effect
 Rom. VI. of Sin is *shame, and the end and*
 21, 23. *wages of it is Death.* That to them
 Rom. II. who obey not the truth, but obey unright-
 8, 9. *eousness, God shall render Indignation*
and wrath, tribulation and Anguish, up-
on every Soul of man that doth Evil.
 Matth. That the Sinner's punishment shall be
 XXV. 46. *Everlasting, and his portion in a place*
 XXIV. 51. *of weeping, and wailing, and gnashing*
 XXV. 41. *of teeth; even in a Lake of everlasting*
fire, even in a fire prepar'd for the Devil
and his Angels.

And now, after this account of the Sinners Recompence for all his Labour and Trouble, there cannot, one would think, need any long Application, to perswade us to act, like persons sensible of what has been already delivered under the foregoing heads, and of our engagements with regard to them. Which was the IVth and last thing I propos'd, and that

that I shall dispatch as briefly as may be.

I. Now That which I shall draw from the *first* head, and the Contemplation of the *Works of Darknes*, is, *The Reasonableness of our being extremely well satisfied with our Duty, and heartily thankful for the benefits of the Gospel.* For the more we consider the *Darkness* of those Ages in which our Fore-fathers lived, the better we shall discern the happiness of our own. When men, advanced so far in Wisdom and Vertue, such as *Socrates*, and *Cato*, and some others, whom Antiquity always names with respect and admiration, had yet the misfortune of great Errours both in their Judgment and Practice; This is a manifest Evidence, how necessary some farther Revelation of the Divine Will was to mankind, how unable Nature and Reason are, even when most refin'd and improv'd, to discover all those Rules, which are requisite for the due Government of our selves. And all this contributes to the illustrating God's mercies to Christians so much the more, when the things that were then unsearchable, are now so clear

clear and plain, that even *Babes* may apprehend, and *He that runs may read them*. All the Disguises of Vice are now pulled off, its natural Deformities laid bare, its absurdity and Inconsistence with the Christian's Principles demonstrated, its wretched Consequences plainly forewarn'd. The Beauties of Vertue, and all its engaging Advantages are fairly set before us; And nothing now is wanting, that can in reason be desired, either to convince our Judgments, or to charm our Affections. All which must certainly perswade us, that the Condemnation of those men must needs be very Just, must needs be very Great, who do not rejoice in this *Light*, and use it sincerely; Who do not endeavour the performance of what is so agreeable to the dignity of their Nature, so secure of leading them in the best way to happiness, so easy, and so delightful; with a *Contented* shall I say? No, that's too little, and too low a Character; but with a *Cheerful*, and a *Thankful*, mind.

2. From the *Second* head, which explained what Testimonies are expected of our *having no Fellowship with*
the

the Works of Darkneſs, I wou'd urge in general a *Continual Watch*, and *holy Jealouſy over our ſelves*. Where every compliance with Sin is not only Diſobedience, but Treachery; and where the Danger, and the Diſpleaſure ſuch offences incur, are ſo dreadful, no care can be enough. And if we wou'd but once be made ſenſible, how Cunning our great Enemy of Souls is, to turn every thing into an occaſion of Sin; We ſhou'd walk like men in the miſt of Traps and Snares, or upon Rocks and narrow Precipices. There is no truſting of our ſelves too near the Cockatrices Den; no playing upon the hole of the Aſp, if we expect to be ſafe; the beſt ſecurity is keeping at a diſtance, that we may have leiſure to look about us; and either flee betimes, and eſcape the Temptation; or be prepared for reſiſting it, when it ſhall overtake us. But whatever it is that leads into Sin, or has by experience been already found to endanger our falling into it; The man who indulges himſelf in that thing, ſets open the door, and invites the Devil to come in; He awakens and aſſiſts the wicked Spirit
againſt

The Holiness required

against himself; and is so perversely officious in his own ruine, that this man does in a manner Tempt the very Tempter.

3. But *Thirdly*; my Last particular enforces both the other Inferences, For the more Just, to be sure, are our Thanks and Joy for being delivered from *Darkness*, the more Necessary and Reasonable our exceeding great Care to avoid the *works* of it, if those works are, as I have shew'd them to be, *Unfruitful*. And therefore all I shall add upon this head, is what the Prophet call'd upon the *Jews* so earnestly for. * *Remember this and shew your selves men; bring it again to mind O ye Transgressors.*

* Isaiah
XLVI. 8.

Be not so rash and giddy, but allow your selves the benefit of a Second thought. Consider what is to be propos'd from Sin, before you commit it; Think, O think betimes, how short, how poor, how low, the enticing Pleasures of it are; The Soothings of Sense for a moment, or the imperfect and uncertain enjoyment of things which no man can promise himself the continuance of, no not an hour. A *Laughter* it may be indeed,
but

but a Laughter in *the midst of which the heart is sorrowful*; and a Taste of Honey in the mouth, sure to be turned to Gall in the Stomach. And when you have weighed all these in a just ballance, and pass'd a true and impartial Estimate upon them, you will then confess them at the best but Unprofitable and Vain, and that they who sell themselves to work wickedness, *sell themselves for nought*.

But still they *sell themselves*; (if that can be a proper term, where no price is paid) that is, They part with that propriety and government God and nature have given them, to every eager and enticing Lust; to every trifle of a Temptation; nay to the Enemy of mankind, to be *taken captive* and dispos'd of *at his Will*. They cast away their Soul, the noblest work of God's hand here below; on which he has stamp'd his Image, and made it immortal. That Jewel of inestimable worth, which the *whole world* Matth. XVI. 26. is too cheap an Exchange for, and was therefore thought worthy the purchase of the blood of God himself. And must these Treasures be so lavishly squandered away? Must what has once cost
so

so dear, be alienated for no benefit, no Consideration at all? None did I say? most happy were it if there were none. *Bring it again to mind, therefore O ye Transgressors.* Sit down and ask your selves, whether you wou'd be content to give your persons away for so little, to the perplexity of false Hopes, and immoderate Desires, and confounding Fears; to the Misgivings of Guilt, and the amazing Agonies of a wounded Conscience; to forced Diseases and untimely Deaths; to the Horrors of Despair at your Last hour, and when that hour is past, to certain and eternal Damnation; the Vengeance of a God never to be appeased, and the Torments of a fire never to be quenched. *Remember this therefore O ye Transgressors, and shew your selves men;* for Otherwise you cannot be Men. While you pursue Death, and court Sorrow and Ruine; while for a Dream, a Shadow, a mere Nothing, You are even pleased to throw away the most precious Substance in the world, you quite unman your selves, and forfeit all pretensions to the Character of reasonable Creatures.

Good

Good God ! How strange, and yet how common is this Infatuation ! that carries men thus away, in despite of all reason, in despite of Religion, and (which in other Cases seldom fails to moves us) in despite of all Interest too to the Contrary. Let us at last (my Brethren) think it high time to recover our Souls from this strong Possession, to restore our selves to Consideration and Thought, to reflect upon our Advantages, and act for the future as becomes Men. Men that are thankful for God's mercies, desirous to answer the intent of them to our selves, zealous for his Honour, and our own benefit ; mindful of our most reasonable Engagements ; and therefore most reasonable, because they bind us to forsake such *works* only as are *unfruitful*. And in order to this, we shall do well to add our Prayers to our Resolutions and Endeavours, and continually to beg God's assistance, as the Church has instructed us to do in her Collect for the 3d *Sunday* after *Easter*, with which I conclude this Discourse.

Almighty

Almighty God ; who shewest to them that be in errour the Light of thy truth, to the intent that they may return into the way of Righteousness ; Grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's Religion, that they may eschew those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SERMON III.

T H E

Mercy and Justice of God

In distributing

GOSPEL-ADVANTAGES.

St. Matth. XX. 9, 10.

*When They came that were hired
about the Eleventh hour, they
received every man a Penny.*

*But when the First came, they sup-
posed that They should have re-
ceived more : and They likewise
received every man a Penny.*

MY Text is part of a Parable,
made use of by our Blessed
Saviour to illustrate that
Saying, which concludes the Nine-
F Ch. XIX
teenth 30.

teenth, and is again repeated in This
 XX. 16. Chapter. *Many that are first shall be last ; and the last shall be first.* By which is signified the Method, by which God thinks fit to proceed, in imparting to mankind the Advantages and Rewards of the Gospel. And the Image our Lord chooses to represent it by is This.

Verf. 1. A Master of a Family is here described using great diligence to *hire Labourers into his Vineyard*, and taking them into his Service at different times of the Day. With those who were received early he makes a positive Agreement for a determinate

Verf. 4. 7. Summ. To the Rest, who went in later, he promises in general Terms, a Reward reasonable and fit for them. In the Evening, when these Workmen were brought together to receive their Wages, They who had wrought but a little while, were first called ; and had as much given them, as Those who laboured the whole Day had covenanted for. This raised the Expectations of the Early Workmen, not doubting, but a Master so bountiful for the Service of One, or but a Few hours, would not fail in proportion

portion to advance Their Wages too. But, to their great Astonishment and Indignation, the Steward is commanded to let them have their just Hire, and no more. And the Payment made to these two sorts of Labourers, so distant from what they both looked for, is what the Words now read take express notice of. *When they came who were hired about the Eleventh hour, &c.*

The Scope and End of this whole Similitude seems to be Two-fold, *viz.* *To check the Vanity of Some who may value themselves upon having been long in the Vineyard; and To encourage and sustain Others who might entertain but feeble hopes of Recompence, from their being called in at the latter end of the Day.* Such Passages therefore, as strictly answer this End are the substantial and necessary parts of the Parable, and ought to be strictly attended to. The rest we need not be very nice about, but may consider them only as Circumstances, inserted to make the Resemblance more beautiful and moving. The Applications of this Parable, must likewise be suited to the main design of it: and the

Doctrines deduced from thence such as carry an exact agreement with, and are the natural Result of, that Design. Of these the Principal seem to lye within the compass of my Text, which propounds to our Consideration the *Justice* and the *Mercy* of God, in rewarding his Servants under the Gospel-Covenant. *Mercy* to Them, who receive *the Penny*, notwithstanding they were hired but *at the Eleventh hour*: Yet this, without any derogation to his *Justice* towards them who receive no more, notwithstanding they came into the Work sooner.

These are the Points I have undertaken to treat of from the Words. And in order hereunto, it will only be needful to premise, that by *The Kingdom of Heaven* I understand the dealings of God with Mankind under the Christian Dispensation. Calling us to the Faith and Obedience of his Blessed Son, who rules in our hearts and administers the Kingdom of Grace here; and rewarding that Faith and Obedience in Heaven, where he shall reign in the Kingdom of Glory hereafter. So that by the Wages, or the *Penny* is chiefly meant that
 Eternal

Eternal Happiness awarded to Good men in the next World; Not excluding but implying, in Subordination to that future Recompence, all the Benefits and Privileges of the Christian Religion, which lead on toward that Triumphant State, while as yet the Church is Militant in this World.

There are but Two sorts of Application necessary to be taken notice of; because all the rest, which Learned men have thought upon, will, I think, either be comprehended under these, or may, by Parity of Reason, be deduced from them.

The First is That, which supposes this Parable to proceed, as in truth most of our Saviour's Parables do, upon a Comparison between the Jews and Gentiles.

The Second brings it home to particular Christians; and accommodates this whole Matter to the Age of Man, and the several Stages of our Lives.

Now to render my present Discourse as full and satisfactory as I am able, I shall take in both these Senses; and

The Mercy and Justice of God

will endeavour to shew, that the giving to every *Labourer a Penny*; that is, making the *Gentiles* equal with the *Jews*, and *late Penitents* equal with more *early Converts*, as this Parable, when duly observed, represents the matter to us; that these Proceedings, I say, are neither of them any just Reflection upon the Righteousness of God, and that his Bounty and Mercy are eminently magnified in Both.

I. *I begin with his Mercy.*

Some by the several Hours mentioned here, have understood the several Ages of the World. So as that *Hiring Labourers early in the Morning* should allude to the Revelations God made of himself to the Fathers before the Flood. The *Third hour*, to his calling *Abraham* and the *Patriarchs* out of the Corruptions of Idolatry. The *Sixth* to the Institution of the Law promulged by *Moses*. The *Ninth* to the Prophetick Age. And the *Eleventh* or Close of the Day, to That dispensation, which is the Last men are ever to expect, the Gospel of Christ. But these are Niceties, upon which no great Stress need be laid. For all our Saviour seems to have intended by distinguish-

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ing the time after this manner, is only to express himself according to the Custom of the *Jews*. Who began to reckon their Day from Sun-rising, and parcell'd out the Whole into Four Watches or Divisions: At the beginning of Three of these, and once more at the last hour, the Lord of the Vineyard renews his Call, and takes in as many as were ready, and willing to come.

By This, no doubt, we are given to understand, that God has done all that became him toward men's Conversion. He called when he was under no obligation; He sought Them who enquired not after Him; He did not only go out early to seek them; but he repeated his Invitations. And, though the Excuse made at the Sixth Verse is not expressly refuted, nor were they who urged it rejected, yet we cannot certainly infer, that this was admitted as a just and sufficient Plea. They of the *Eleventh hour* were indeed idle, because *no man had hired them*; but still, might it not be their own fault, that they were not hired sooner? For the same Master went out to seek them before; He

came to the *Market*, the place whither Labourers usually resorted, and where they ought to have been ready to offer themselves ; and as many as were then present, and did accept his Service he kindly retained. So that this Passage seems to stop the mouths, not of *Jews* only, but of all pretended Christians too, who complain, that they want means and opportunities for becoming the men they ought to be. For this delay is very often too manifestly their own Fault. Opportunities have been put into their hands, and let slip through their own Sloth and Negligence. The Lord of the Vineyard sought them sooner, but they were not found. And in this case, the Blame will return at last upon their own want of Care, and of more early Preparation. For had those who came in at the *Sixth*, and *Ninth*, and *Eleventh* hours, been there at the *First* and *Third*, we have reason to think they had been hired then ; At least they had done their parts. But nothing less than being up at the earliest hour can acquit them from the Imputation of Idle and Sluggish Servants.

Not

Not but that God does herein differ greatly from any Master of a Vineyard, that his Bounty and Condescensions are infinitely greater, and peculiar to Himself alone. He *waits over* Isa. XXX. *men's Souls continually to do them good*: 18.

He does not only call, but he disposes our minds to hearken to, and comply with that Call; and in his merciful Providence times his Calls so, that they shall be repeated at Seasons most favourable, and when we are best prepared to obey them. These are the Methods of his abundant Grace, and as such they are to be received. For, as those *Labourers* could have no just complaint against the *Householder*, supposing him to have gone but once into the *Market*, because it was their duty to have been ready then; but it was great kindness to employ them afterwards: So, when Almighty God hath once made sufficient tenders of Salvation, and we have neglected them; if we perish, the Fault is our own. But if, notwithstanding our Backwardness and unprepared hearts, those Offers be repeated to us again and again: This is not Debt but Favour; not an act of Justice, but the free
Effect

The Mercy and Justice of God

Effect of his unspeakable and exuberant Goodness.

Thus much however must in reason be allowed, that the more Opportunities of this kind have been formerly let go, and the more voluntary those Neglects have been, the greater must the Condemnation of those men needs be, who have stood out against them, or not put themselves in the way of them before: And the greater is the Mercy, which admits such into Grace at the last Call, and passes by all their former Contempts. And yet This will most assuredly be done upon their Compliance even then. For God does by no means intend to mock men by any of his Invitations, He makes them with a kind intent, He considers, more exactly than we are capable of doing, what advantages each person hath had, and what he hath wanted; what Hindrances have kept him off so long; and why One Call is more successful than Another.

We may say then with great Truth, concerning these Spiritual Dispensations, what *David* did of God's Providence in our Temporal Affairs, that
his

his Goodness standeth like the strong ^{Psal.} *Mountains.* This is highly exalted, ^{XXXVI.} *and eminently visible to all the world:* ^{6.} *but his Judgments are like the great Deep: Vast and Dark, and such as Mortal Eyes cannot see through. Yet is not this Depth so absolutely impenetrable neither, but that we may enter so far into it as is necessary for our present purpose. We may know enough to justify God in his Dealings, though we cannot go to the bottom of his infinitely Wise and Mystrious Counsels. And therefore, having shewed the Mercy of God's receiving any manner of men into his Vineyard and Pay.*

II. *I come now to consider the Justice of his making Them equal in the wages, who are thus unequally received into the Work.* Which indeed is the only Difficulty in the Case. For we do not find the Goodness of this *Householder* ever brought in question: So far from That, that the Excess of it was reckoned injurious: And the *First Labourers* thought their Master *evil* and hard upon Them, because he was so bountiful, so seemingly Over-good, to those who came into the Vineyard last.

Now

Now in order to our better discerning this matter, we will briefly state the Difference between these sorts of Labourers in the Parable, according to the Applications usually made of it; and then examine what account can be given of this surprising distribution of Rewards in their several Cases.

The *Jews* bear proportion to *Labourers hired early*, for They had long submitted to a Religion instituted by God, a Law clogg'd with rigorous Ordinances, and very troublesome Observations. In this respect they might truly be said to *have born the burden and heat of the Day*. But the *Gentiles* had wrought their own Wills, lived all along in Ignorance and Idolatry, Luxury and Lasciviousness, and yet These too had the tenders of the Gospel and Eternal Life made to them. And as many as embraced those Offers were vested in a Title to the Kingdom of Heaven; A Title equal with those *Jews*, who had lived under a severe confinement, and born the heavy Yoke of the *Mosaick* Institution.

Verf. 12.

So again. The Apostles and first Christians came in to the Gospel at
their

their utmost peril and expence. Their Fortunes, their Fame, their Liberties, their Lives, were the purchase paid for their Faith. And yet the same Kingdom of Heaven is opened for sincere Believers of all After-ages : though the times they live in be peaceable, the Encouragements to Christianity secular, and all the heat of publick Persecution extinct and over.

Thus as to particular Persons. Some are *trained up from Children in the way they should go, and when they are old, they do not depart from it.* Prov. XXII. 6. They conquer and quench the irregular heats of Youth and Passion betimes, and, as much as the frailty of humane nature will allow, do *keep themselves unspotted from the world.* Jam. I. 27. Others *rejoyce, and let their heart cheer them in their Youth, they walk in the ways of their own heart, and in the sight of their own Eyes, till the Evil days come, and the Years in which they can no longer have pleasure ;* Eccles. XI. 9. XII. 1. and yet if even then they remember their Creator he shews himself *merciful and gracious, slow to anger and of great Goodness ;* Joel II. 12. And though it be late, yet if it be sincerely and effectually, that they come back to

to their duty, he opens his arms wide to embrace the returning Prodigals, pardons their long disobedience, saves their Souls, and bestows upon them a Glorious and Eternal Recompence.

And *lastly*, (which proceeds upon the same measures) They who have their Days shortned, and are cut off in the midst of their Age, if they dye in Innocence, or in early and promising Vertue, are entitled to Happiness, in common with Others, who live long, and glorify God by much Labour and Suffering, and through severe Tryals, and great Hardships, enter at last into the Kingdom of Heaven.

These several Cases the Importance of the Parable may very reasonably be extended to; and I must try now to reconcile those Doubts, which so great a Disproportion of Persons and Circumstances may be apt to suggest to us: and must shew, if I can, that whatever we may think of the matter, still the Judge of all the Earth in giving this *penny* to each of them, does nothing but right. And throughout this whole Disquisition I shall make use chiefly, if not altogether, of such

Argu-

Arguments, as the Parable it self furnishes either plain ground for, or at least very fair Intimations of.

I. Now, *First* of all, We may observe some difference taken notice of in the Parable, *between these Labourers themselves*; and that, partly *before*, and partly *after* their work. The *First* drove a positive bargain, and agreed expressly for a *Penny a Day*: They Verf. 2. who came later, were content to stand to their Master's Courtesy, and undertook the work upon this general Promise, that *whatsoever was right that they should receive.* Verf. 4. 7. And again, when the Toil and Duty was over, These Last received their Pay with Thankfulness and Decency; but the Former with Murmurings and sawcy Expostulations; envying their Brethren's good Acceptance, and boldly arraigning their Lord's Justice.

The same is to be said of those Persons, to whom this Parable is generally supposed to refer; and many Qualifications are observable in Them, which might move God to govern his Distributions by the same Measures here too. The *Jews* were under the constant direction of his Laws, but then they
were

Grot. in
loc.

were of a slavish and mercenary Disposition; Driven by present Punishments, and encouraged by Temporal Blessings. Prosperous Successes of this Life were literally indented for, and whatever they received, they look'd upon it as a Debt. Whereas the *Gentiles*, on the contrary, were under no such former Covenant; These, when called into the *Vineyard*, threw themselves at their Lord's feet, closed with the Gospel upon his own Terms, stood entirely to His Goodness; went chearfully to work, and were content with the prospect of distant and unseen Rewards: and whatever was given Them, they received it as the effect of Grace and great Beneficence. And this may very well be admitted for one good Consideration, to recommend them to more favour.

Again, We must remember, that the Value of any Service or Obedience rises, in proportion to the Difficulties and Disadvantages, which the Person breaks through to pay it. And this presents us with another mighty Disparity in the Case now under debate. The *Jews* had been breed up in a Religion, which had little else in it, but
Shadows

Shadows and Figures of the Christian dispensation. They had heard the Voice of the Prophets every day, and were well acquainted with the Testimony of Miracles, by which our *Jesus* proved his Mission and Messiahship. The Moral Law was likewise an excellent preparation for those Doctrines of higher Perfection, which the Gospel built upon it; And the Knowledge of the true God, and his former Revelations, made the passage more easy for the Mysteries of the Christian Faith. For persons therefore thus qualified to come in to the Preaching and the Church of Christ, was no more than might in reason be expected, and They, who did it not, were justly reprobated, as past all Excuse. But it was no less surprising, on the other hand, that the *Gentiles*, who knew very little of God before, and had run greedily into all manner of Impurity and Excess, should on a sudden make so brave a Stand. That They should at once renounce all their polluted Worship, and Licentious Conversation, and conform to the Precepts of a most Holy Religion; That They, who in former Ages were utter

G

Strangers

John I.
11.

Strangers to the true God, should receive the Word of God Incarnate, at a time, when he *came to his Own Family, and his Own received him not.* But above all, This was a most amazing instance of their Sincerity and marvellous Zeal, that Men, who lived so much in the dark about the Immortality of the Soul, and who absolutely denied the Resurrection of the Body, should with such Alacrity forego the Enjoyments of the present world, and stake down their very Lives, for a Crown to be obtain'd after Death; In a State, of which they had never known, scarce ever heard any thing at all before.

The Condition of Late Penitents is thus far the same; that They too attain to a through Reformation, and a Godly Life very hardly. For Habits of the Mind, and especially Vicious ones, are not vanquish'd without much Labour, and many sharp Disputes. The power of Custom is exceeding great; but in Wicked practices the Difficulty is doubled, because there Corrupt Nature strikes in, and Custom is strengthened by Inclination. All the Advances that a Man thus fallen can make,
are

are so many Violences committed upon himself. And the bringing the Byass of Sensual Appetite to draw true, working the Soul to a Disrelish of unlawful Gains and Pleasures, and making ones self a *New Heart*, and a *New Spirit*, are long and laborious Undertakings. Such they are indeed, as nothing but Experience can give us any just notion of; Unknown to those happy men, who have always preserved their good Principles, and never drunk of Vice, nor tasted its intoxicating Pleasures. These have nothing to do, but to proceed: to maintain their ground, and advance smoothly, as new opportunities of Improvement shall offer, and the sensible Delights of Holiness quicken them up to it. And if the God of Mercy be gracious to this constant and sedate Piety, where every thing is agreeable and inviting, shall he not extend his Bowels of Compassion, to Them also, who serve him in Tears, and Groans, in bitter Remorse and earnest Prayers? Will he despise the Terroures and Confusions, the Sorrows and Reproaches of a self-condemning Breast? No, no. He will behold such Anguish with

Pity, and assist the Pangs and Strugglings of this Second Birth : It is an act becoming his Fatherly tenderness, his essential Goodness, and Wisdom, and Justice, to make those gallant Combatants. Triumphant hereafter, whom nothing less than an undaunted Zeal, and a powerful Faith, long time, indefatigable pains, and invincible Resolution, could ever have rendered Victorious over Sin here. And upon the account, that such a mighty Change argues a noble Disposition ; a Change, which none but Great and Generous Souls have the Courage to go through with ; Upon this account, I say, probably it is, that our Blessed Saviour declares elsewhere, *There is more Joy in Heaven over one Sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine Just Persons, that need no Repentance,* i. e. This Alteration is not only more sensible, but in some respects more acceptable, more commendable, than an easy uninterrupted course of steady and always successful Vertue ; which never felt the dangers, nor lay under the Discouragements, of former defeats, and an insulting Conqueror to rally and make head against, with forces

Luke XV.
7. 10.
Chrysol.
Tom. 5.
Serm. 52.
Pag. 353.
Ed. Eton.

forces often beat, and miserably broken.

2. But, *Secondly*. The Parable observes another Difference between these *Labourers, after the Work was over*; That, They who were hired late received their pay with all due Humility and Thankfulness, but those that came in early, with Repining and Indignation. *They murmured against the Good man of the House* (says the Verse next after my Text) This Passage *St. Chrysostom* will by no means allow us to understand strictly and literally. It being a contradiction to all our Notions of Heaven, that any grumbling or envious Disposition should be admitted thither: And therefore he looks upon it, as a Circumstance of the Parable purely Ornamental, and set to signify so great a degree of Happiness, as would naturally provoke our Envy in this World. And thus, no doubt, with regard to the Recompence of another Life we are obliged to take it: But yet (as he observes withal) there is a great deal both of Energy and Truth, in this Expression, so far as the Parable concerns the Calling in of the *Gentiles*. For nothing

Chryf. in
loc. T. 2.
Serm. 64.
Pag. 408.

is more remarkable, than the implacable Malice and proud Spight of the *Jews*, upon this occasion ; Which carried them to such an Excess, as even to refuse Salvation, and think it beneath their acceptance, if they must have it in common with other despised Nations. This is manifestly the Fault our Saviour aimed at here ; and it is that, which many persons, of lives unblameable for the main, are, in all ages, guilty of. An over-valuing of their own Righteousness, and a thinking Scorn, (with that *Elder Brother* in the Parable) that Returning *Prodigals*, Wretches once profligate and infamous, should have an equal place in their Heavenly Father's Love.

Luke XV.
28, 29, 30.

But now the *Gentiles* formerly, and many reform'd Sinners since, have endeared themselves particularly to Almighty God, by their deep Humility and Meekness of Spirit, by resembling Him in a most extensive Charity, a generous Largeness of Heart, which fills them with unfeigned Joy at the Recovery of their once lost, and to all appearance desperate, Brethren, inclines them to delight in the Happiness of all mankind, and to esteem
their

their own more exalted, when the Mercy of God is magnified, and the number of his Blessed Saints increased.

3. *Thirdly.* It is very probable there may be Another Difference, not less considerable than either of the Former; and that is a *Difference in the Work it self.* The Parable indeed is silent in this particular, perhaps for a Reason which I shall mention hereafter: But some *Jewish* Fables very like this, reply thus to the murmuring Servants, *This man hath the hire of a Day because he hath in two hours done the work of a whole Day.* Thus much however is certain in the Subject before us, that the *Gentiles* are frequently commended, for excelling in Zeal, and in the Graces of Christianity; doing things to their utmost, nay even *beyond their power*, and fired by a generous Emulation to *come behind the Jews* in no Vertue. Thus also upon Repentance from a very dissolute Life, we often observe men act with double Vigour, and indefatigable Diligence; sadly sensible of the Time they have lost, and impatient to redeem it by the best improvement of that little they have left; desirous to make Religion

See Hammond here Note b.

2 Cor. VIII. 3.
1 Cor. I. 7.

Luke VII.
44, &c.

some amends for the injury and dishonour they have done it formerly, and to give the world satisfaction for the Scandal of an ill Example, by setting one as eminently good, and being for the future the very Reverse of what they were before. And that this is the natural Consequence of breaking off from a wicked course, is plain from our Saviour's discourse upon washing his feet; where he applies to the different behaviour of a Penitent Woman, and a proud Pharisee, that Parable of the two Debtors, which proves, that He who is most sensible of the Greatness of his Sins, and the Mercy of Forgiveness, will naturally love God most, and by all his actions give testimony that he does so.

1 Cor. XV.
8, 9. 10.

Thus St. Paul says in his own Vindication, that, though he was the *last*, and *least of the Apostles*, not *worthy* that name, because as one *born out of due time, and once a Persecutor of the Church of God*, yet *he laboured more abundantly than they all*. And in such a case, a man's Obedience will be measured, not by Length of Time, but by the Fervency of the Desire, and the Sincerity of the Heart. A few exalted
acts

acts of Constancy and Piety may express a man's affection as effectually as many years practice; and in the balance of Equity weigh against a multitude of Others, where the Circumstances were not so trying. And God, who sees the Heart, judges us, not only by what we do, but by what we are ready and resolved to do, and would certainly accomplish, if we had opportunity. Thus Innocence or early Vertue may be crowned, not only for the little it hath done, but for the noble Fruits, which God foresees that generous Plant would bear, had not he for wise reasons cut it off, before it arrived to ripeness of Years and Judgment. Thus a Man, who is heartily disposed to continue faithful in despite of all hardship and suffering, may be considered for that habitual Steadiness of mind, no less than if God had brought the fiery Tryal upon him. And thus the Thief upon the Cross, by one Glorious Confession of Christ at his last hour, obtained remission of his whole pass'd wicked Life, and an entrance into Paradise that very day.

When

The Mercy and Justice of God

When I urge these Arguments, my meaning is only thus much. That This is oftentimes the Case, and that there is a great deal in the Reason and Nature of the thing, which should push on the Labourers who come in late, to exert and distinguish themselves in the works of Righteousness, and Charity, and a strict exemplary Conversation. So that an equal Reward is not supposed by this Particular, except there be an equal Vertue. But then this Vertue may be either apparent in the outward Acts, or it may be inward in the Disposition, which to God, who is the Judge and Rewarder, is all one; for He sees it, though Men do not. Where there is no such equality in the Persons, the Parable does not assert any equality in the Wages; for the Aphorism illustrated is not *All*, but *Many that are first shall be last, and the last, shall be first*, Or (as another Evangelist hath expressed it) *Behold there are Last which shall be First, and there are First which shall be Last*. Some Gentiles, (that is,) who have not the same advantages of Faith and a Good Life, will excel some Jews, who have greater :

Ch. XIX.
30.

Luk. XIII.
30.

ter: And Some late Penitents will out-do others of an early Piety: The Arrogant Righteous shall be degraded for their Envy and Spiritual Pride; And the Contrite, the Humble, the Charitable Convert shall be exalted and prefer'd: The Vertues conspicuous in one sort of these men being thus cast into Scales, against those which the Other have not, or have them in a less degree, or sully them with some Blemish or notable Imperfection.

Thus much for the *First* Reason arising from those Differences, which the Parable it self leads us to observe between the late and early Labourers. But it must be confess'd,

II. *Secondly*, That the Main Argument, and that wherein the Parable is most express, why this Proceeding cannot possibly be any imputation upon the *Justice* of Almighty God, is what we meet with here in answer to the grumbling Workmen, in the Conclusion of this Representation, *Friend, I do thee no wrong. Didst not thou agree with me for a Penny? Take that is thine, and go thy way. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own? Is thine Eye evil, because I am good?*

Verf. 13,
14,
15.

good? This Reply teaches us, *that* Eternal Life is at least a valuable (it is indeed an infinite and most disproportionate) Consideration, for the best and most laborious Services: *that* it is God's *own* to do what he will with, a free Gift even to Them who make good Their part. For it was his Mercy alone, which moved him to seek these Labourers; And admit them to so advantageous an Agreement. And we cannot be guilty of a vainer thought, nor cast a greater Blemish upon our good works, than to suppose Heaven due to them, as a strict and adequate Reward. To inculcate this notion of God's Bounty and free Grace the more, I take the mention of those Servants Work to be omitted, who were sent into the Vineyard in the declining of the Day. And not only so, but This shews us moreover, that, when We our selves are satisfied, and have all we can pretend to, it no way concerns Us how Other people are dealt with. Almighty God is Master of his own Favours, and when he does right and justice to All, though he should to Some give Over-measure, yet this cannot be any
wrong

wrong to Them who have their Full measure. To find fault with our Lord's liberality in such distributions argues insufferable Insolence and Vanity; and would not be, were we but thoroughly possess'd with that modest opinion of our own performances, and that Grateful Sense of his Goodness, which is due to a God, of whose abundant and mere mercy it is, that even the Best men receive at least as much, in truth infinitely more than they ever did, or can deserve.

I beg your patience but one moment longer, while I deliver the Text from Two Erroneous Opinions, which unwary Readers may be apt to draw from it: And these are all the Inferences I shall raise from the foregoing Discourse.

I. And *First*, It cannot with any good reasoning be concluded from hence, that *the Rewards of all Good men in the next world are equal*. The Scripture manifestly prefers Some good works before Others, and it affirmstoo, that *God rewardeth every man according to his works*. It declares, that *He which soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly; and He which soweth bountifully, shall* *reap*

Matth. IX.

13.
XII. 7.

Psal. LXII.

12.

2 Cor. V.

10.

2 Cor. IX.

6.

reap bountifully. So then Both shall *reap*, because both have *sown*; but yet Each shall *reap*, in proportion to what Each hath *sown*. By the *Penny* here is meant Eternal Life, and the Happiness of all the Blessed shall be Eternal. The *Jews*, who receive and obey the Gospel, shall go to Heaven, and so shall the *Gentiles*. The men of constant Holiness shall go to Heaven, and so shall the sincere Penitents. The Martyrs shall be crowned, and so shall the Christians, who live well, and die in Peace. This is the utmost, that the Analogy of the Parable directs us to, that these several sorts of persons shall be Happy; and that the Happiness of them all shall never have an End. But, whether all their Crowns shall be equally bright, whether the Degrees of their Felicity shall be the same, is a Question foreign to our present purpose, and such as the Text is no way concern'd in. Nay, we are assured, both from Reason and Scripture, that they shall not. For, though all the *Righteous shall shine in the Kingdom of their Father*, yet St. Paul, in his discourse of the Resurrection and a Future State, hath

in distributing Gospel-Advantages. 95

hath told us, that there too *One Star* 1 Cor. XV: 41.
differeth from another Star in glory. Chrysoft. in loc. & T. 5.

2. *Secondly.* The Favour shewed here to Them who were hired at the *Eleventh hour*, is no encouragement for Serm. 33. Pag. 212.

any man's delaying his Repentance, no not one Moment. For, What is this *Eleventh hour*? Strictly and properly it is no doubt God's last Call to Mankind; and that Call is made in the Gospel; there being no other Religion to succeed in the place of this, No new Covenant, or more advantageous Terms in reserve, for Them who do not come in, and close with these. And though we should, (as we may conveniently enough) apply this to the Age of each particular Christian; Yet even thus it gives no countenance to the frivolous excuses of Slothful and Impenitent Sinners. For we do not read, that They who were *hired* then, had heard the Call sooner. The Parable is silent, as to the Causes of their Absence, and, though indeed it hints Idleness to have been at the bottom, yet it no where says, that there were Any present, at the *First*, and *Third*, and *Sixth*, and *Ninth* hours, who, after peremptorily

ptorily refusing to come in then, were called again, and received at the *Eleventh*. So that This does by no means come up to the Case of those obstinate and refractory, those unperfwadeable and incorrigible Wretches, in whose Ears the Instructions and holy Importunities of God are continually sounding; and yet they harden themselves, and make it a point of wicked Bravery to turn the deaf Ear, and hold out against them. What reason can we assign then, why God should not give such people over to their own foolish perverse choice, by withdrawing his Grace, and leaving off those so long fruitless attempts to do them good?

But farther yet, supposing God not to be so far provoked, as to suffer his wrath to take place in this respect; yet, considering the Condition of humane Nature, and the Uncertainty of Life, why should we not look upon Every hour as our *Eleventh* hour? Each invitation to our happiness, may be the last that ever will be made us. Each Sermon, the last we may ever hear: Each Sacrament, the last we may ever be allowed to partake of. We can have no absolute Assurance that it shall not
be

be so ; and it would be our wisdom to behave our selves, as though we were assured it shall be so. But I forbear pursuing this Argument here, and refer my Reader for more full conviction to the next discourse. In the mean while it would well become every one of us, frequently and seriously to apply to his own Case, what our Blessed Lord once said of himself, *I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is Day, because our Sun declines apace, and the night cometh on, wherein no man can work.* Joh. IX. 4.

Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Three Persons, and One God, be all Honour and Glory, for ever. Amen.

SERMON IV.

THE

PENITENT THIEF

No Encouragement for a

Death-bed Repentance.

St. Luke XXIII. 42, 43.

And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me, when thou comest into thy Kingdom.

And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.

MY Text is part of a Passage, very Remarkable, very Comfortable, very Instructive. But such a one withal, as deserves to be very carefully considered, because other-

otherwise it may be abused to the worst of purposes, and have that Encouragement, which it administers to Grievous, provided they be sincerely Penitent, Offenders, perverted into an occasion of dangerous Security to the Habitual and Negligent Sinners. I shall therefore make it my business so to treat of this Thief upon the Cross, received into Grace at his last hour, as to encourage all wicked men to Repentance; yet without flattering such in a false and unreasonable hope of finding God as easy to be reconciled to Them, who wilfully drive off the making their Peace with him till their last hour.

It might indeed be reasonably expected, that several other very weighty and profitable points might have some place in a Discourse upon this Subject. But That which I have more especially in view, and the only one I shall insist upon at present, is This. *That* This Example, when rightly understood, and equally weighed in all its Circumstances, is no reasonable ground for any man's deferring his Reformation one single hour; much less than for depending upon a Death-

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bed Repentance, to procure him Pardon and Salvation.

There are sundry Arguments fetch'd from Reason and Scripture, which, if men would have the Patience to attend to seriously and impartially, could not, one would think, but prevail with them, to set about a Work, which even They, that excuse themselves from doing it in good earnest, confess to be absolutely necessary. But when they are pressed to begin it speedily, when We, whose Office and Duty oblige us, to call upon, and vehemently importune them to this ungrateful Undertaking, warn them how dangerous Delays are; how fatal in this, above any other Matter; They presently take Shelter in the Instance of my Text, and are willing to think that Their Faults are less than those of this Thief, and therefore they can see no reason, why their Repentance, though it come as late, should not be altogether as successful. Now in detecting this darling Imposture, I cannot stay to urge a speedy Repentance, from all the Topicks proper for that purpose; but must confine my self within the Compass of this so much abused

abused Example. And I shall be satisfied with hoping, that when once the Sinner is beaten from this hold, the other Arguments usually produced to this purpose, will find him open to their force, and be able to make a Conquest of him.

And here, that we may bring the Matter to as quick and as fair an Issue as is possible, I am content for the present (to give up some things, which yet perhaps, were I disposed to be tenacious, would not so easily be wrested from me ; and) to allow the Pretensions for a Late and Death-bed Repentance, all the Advantages, which the Case before us can in any tolerable Construction furnish them with ; As, for the purpose in these following Instances.

1. *First*, Whereas some have thought it probable, that this Thief might have been guilty in One Fact only, which though the Laws of men take hold of, is yet in the Eye of God less offensive, than long and wilful habits of Sins less scandalous in their own Nature ; and that he might possibly have repented long before, of this Fact too, for which he was now put to Death ;

H 3

I shall

I shall make no difficulty both to suppose that he was an old, habitual Sinner in other Instances, and to allow that his Conversion and Repentance were of no older date, than this publick Declaration of them mentioned by *St. Luke*. Nay, if you please, I will accept *St. Chrysostom's* and *St. Jerome's* Method of reconciling This with the other Evangelists ; Which is, that this Thief also did at first joyn with his Fellow in reproaching and railing at Jesus ; but that afterwards by our Lord's behaviour, and the many miraculous Appearances at his Passion, he was powerfully wrought upon, and presently changed as we see. And consequently his Acceptance with Christ must have proceeded from this sudden, this late, Conviction and Repentance. A Repentance begun, as well as finished, in the very Act of Death.

2. *Secondly*, Some have also represented this as an extraordinary and reserved Case, not to be drawn into Example by Others: As Acts of Clemency and Oblivion upon special Emergencies are no warrant for Subjects always to expect the like Impunity

nity or Favour from their Prince. But I am willing to wave this Plea too. I will not put the Grace extended to this dying Malefactor upon God's Supreme Prerogative of Mercy, superseding the standing Measures of Government, as oft as he sees fit; but shall admit it for a common Standard and Universal Rule. So that All, who are under the same Circumstances with this Penitent Thief; may, by Virtue of the Gospel Covenant, promise themselves the same kind reception and full pardon for all the Sins though never so many, never so grievous, of their whole past profligate Life.

3. *Thirdly*, Whereas some have earnestly contended, that Repentance is a Change of Heart and Life both; and that, whatever it may appear, or be charitably hoped and supposed, yet in reality That is no Repentance, which does not prove its own Sincerity by a man's After-acts; I will satisfy myself in the present Argument, with that looser notion of the Word, which implies a Change of the Heart only. Consequently I must grant, that what is commonly (though some pretend very improperly) called a Death-bed

Repentance, may be a true Repentance; Because, though a new Course of Life would be absolutely necessary (did the person survive) to testify the truth of it to Men, yet God, who knows the Heart, needs no such Testimony. And, upon this Supposition, the Nature and Essence of Repentance will consist in a Renewing of the Mind and Affections; and the Actions will not be so much a part of the thing it self, as an Evidence and Demonstration of the thing. Where Death then cuts off all Opportunities of giving such proofs, we cannot upon these terms, conclude a man hath not repented, from his not being able to give Us this Proof of his Repentance.

I would not be mistaken in this matter. I do not assert these things to be just as I have laid them, I do not take upon me to determine one way or other; But, I say, I am content for the present, to have them thought so; as desiring to put the fairest and most favourable State of the Case. And I do not see how any Sinner, who will condescend to reason at all upon this Example, can pretend to carry it farther, in favour of a Death-bed Repentance

tance, than I have now done. And yet after coming down thus to the Sinners own Terms, I hope, by God's assistance, to convince him, that even This Example, thus interpreted, is very far from bearing any man out in deferring his Repentance to his last, nay to the very next day.

Now Every one knows, that, in arguing from Precedents the strength of what we urge depends altogether upon the Resemblance of the Case we argue for, to that Other which we argue from. So far as These two agree, the Reasoning is good ; but where they differ, there can be no Consequence. And if there be any disagreement between them, though but in One material Circumstance, the Former case cannot be admitted for a sufficient Rule or Warrant to the Latter. Since therefore the Argument I am now upon is entirely Precedent and Example, and all I design is to overthrow the false Supports, which men, loath to break with their Sins till they can keep them no longer, have formed to themselves from this Instance of the Thief upon the Cross ; they ought certainly to give up all those

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those Encouragements for treacherous and unreasonable, if I can shew these Three things ;

I. First, *That there were some Circumstances in Case of this Thief, to which that of no other man can ever be parallel.*

II. Secondly, *That, admitting we should come up to his Repentance, so far as it is imitable by us, yet none of us all can have the same Assurance of being pardoned and accepted. But, which is worst of all,*

III. Thirdly, *That it is equally Possible, nay indeed much more Probable, that, when we come to die, His Case may not be Ours, no not even in the very Disposition to repent.*

I. First, It deserves to be very attentively considered, *That there are some Circumstances in the Case of this Penitent Thief, to which the Condition of no other man (but especially of no Christian, who defers his Repentance to a sick or dying Bed) can possibly be parallel.*

Now in examining any of the surprising and unusual Acts of the Divine Mercy,

Mercy, we must be sure always to bring this Rule along with us, *That* Almighty God in the instances of his Love and Compassion is perfectly void of all that byas of Humour, and Passion, and Partial Fondness, which oftentimes are a Blemish to the Proceedings of easy and good-natur'd Men; that He constantly acts with such steadiness, as becomes Infinite Goodness, regulated and duly tempered with Infinite Wisdom and Infinite Justice. And consequently, that all his Dealings are strictly agreeable to Equity and Reason; Even those of them, which we are not able to enter so far into the Grounds of, as to account for them in every particular, to Our selves, or to Others.

Nor can it seem strange, that we should not be able to account for Many matters of this Nature, when we reflect, that the most equitable rule of proceeding, both with God and Man, is to regard the Intentions and Dispositions of the Persons concerned. Now these are things that lye too deep for any but the Searcher of Hearts, to have a distinct sight and entire knowledge of. And therefore
we

we ought always to conclude, that He, to whose view these things lie open, hath sufficient motives which induce him to make a difference in favour of Some above Others. And such difference, so far as we can judge, is made; as oft as They who in all appearance have done less, are made equal to those who in all appearance have done more. For, though God in the riches of his mercy may give Every good man a greater reward than is due to his work, yet his Justice requires, that Each of these good men be considered in proportion to his work. And though the best of us all cannot in rigour deserve Remission of Sins, and Acceptance of our Labours; yet we may have such Qualifications, as will not fail to dispose him to pass by our Faults, and to receive us graciously.

Again, The Worth and Efficacy of such Qualifications is not always to be measured by the Length of Time, or by the number of Acts produced by them. Because it may happen, that a very Few, or but One single Instance may be so circumstantiated, as to give testimony of a man's Sincerity and Zeal,

Zeal, equivalent to a Multitude of others. And this is what I need not labour either to prove, or to apply, in the present Question. For all men must allow, that He, who, in Consideration of Repentance and Faith at his last hour, is received presently into Paradise, does, like *the Labourers of the Eleventh hour*, attain an equal reward with Them, who by a long, painful and constant Obedience, have born the burden and heat of the Day ; And They who interpret that Parable in favour of such a Repentance, alledge, that God accepts the dying Penitent for his Integrity and Zeal ; that he looks upon what the man would have done, as if it had been actually done ; and judges him according to the Desires and good Dispositions he had, and not according to the Opportunities he had not.

From these things thus premised, it plainly appears, that, in order to a right understanding, and fair Application of the Example now before us, it will be necessary to enquire very diligently into those good Dispositions of the Thief upon the Cross, which might reasonably be supposed to recommend

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commend him to Mercy, at his Death, notwithstanding the grievous Offences of his past wicked Life. And, to any person who shall set himself seriously to consider this matter, this Relation of St. *Luke*, and the Case, as now stated, will sufficiently intimate these Two especially.

1. *First*, Great Ingenuity of Temper, and Readiness of Mind to embrace the Faith of Christ, so soon as sufficient means of Conviction were afforded him. 'Tis highly probable, this man had never known any thing of *Jesus* before, otherwise than by common fame; And, if St. *Chrysostom's* and St. *Jerome's* conjectures be just, he was prepossessed against him, as an Impostour: If so, the greater still was his Vertue, to overcome those Prejudices so soon, and suffer the Meekness, and Patience, the Charity and Piety of our Lord's miraculous Death to disabuse him. This is so far from making him a late Penitent, that it gives him the Glory of an early Convert: One, whose heart was open to the first Impressions of Grace, and wanted, not so much the Inclination, as the Opportunity, of being brought over

over to the Truth before. And, which is yet more for his Commendation,

2. *Secondly*, We may discern in him a most vigorous and noble Faith.

* Such as confess'd our Lord in his lowest, most afflicted, and most ignominious Condition. When his hardened Companion reviled him, When the Enemies of Jesus mocked and insulted over him, When his own Disciples had forsaken, and were afraid to own him; Such as took sanctuary in a dying and universally despised Man; Such as published his Innocence to the face, and in despite, of triumphant Malice; and, through the thickest cloud of Shame and Sufferings, that ever intercepted the Glories of the Son of God, discovered his Divine Power; and placed his hope in a Spiritual Kingdom, which Flesh and Blood and Humane Reasoning could never have discovered. A Kingdom which no Eye but that of Faith could have the least glimpse of; which even They who had enjoyed the honour and advantage of a Three-Year's Instruction and inseparable Conversation, never yet perfectly understood, and

now

* Chrysoft.
Tom. 5.
Orat. 7.
Pag. 26.
Edit.
Eton.

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now utterly despaired of. This was to come in *no whit behind*, nay it was in some respects to out-strip the very *Chiefest Apostles*. This was a Confession, so resolute, so singular, so illustrious, that no Preacher, no Martyr, ever came up to all the heightning commendations of it. None gave so ample a Testimony to the Blessed Jesus, because None had this peculiar Excellence, of giving it under so many disadvantageous and discouraging Circumstances.

* Chrysoft.
Tom. 5.
Orat. 7.

And now with what * Forehead, with what Colour can any Late or Death-bed Penitent pretend to draw this Example into a Precedent for his own Support and Advantage? What Affinity, what Shadow of Resemblance is there, between a man submitting to the first Impression, and One, who hath wilfully and industriously hardened his heart against all the Methods of Instruction and amendment? Between a Man accepting offers as soon as they were made; and One who hath refused and thrust away Salvation from him; and stopped his Ears against the most affectionate and vehement Importunities? Between a
Man

Man following readily from the moment he was called ; and One, who hath run headily on a long and obstinate course of Wickedness, ridiculed Religion, cast God's Word behind him, quenched and grieved his Spirit, and esteemed it an instance of Gallantry, and Wit, and better Sense, to continue proof against all its motions and most sollicitous strivings with him for his Souls Good ? Shall we be so unequal Judges in our own Case, so exceedingly blind and corrupt Advocates for Sin, to bring this unexpected Honour paid to our Saviour in his lowest and most deserted State, to the wretched Level of those Men, who, notwithstanding his Resurrection from the Dead, and Exaltation in Glory ; Notwithstanding the Example of the Best and Wisest Men ; Notwithstanding the Conquests made by his Gospel, and the Infamy of denying him, yet injure, and affront, despise and defy him, and will not be prevailed upon to confess and come into him, till they cannot hold out in dishonouring him any longer ? The Thief acknowledged this King upon the Cross, and these Men disown him upon his Throne ; His condition, seemingly forsaken both of

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God and Man, did not discourage That Penitent ; But These wicked Creatures will not be either awed or invited to come into his most prosperous and triumphant State, when all things conspire to encourage their Obedience : And shall we make the One of these cases a Pattern for the Other ? Is it possible, that even Lust and Partiality it self should draw any so perverse, so absurd Consequences, as, from the Acceptance of so ready a compliance, and the Reward of so eminent, so unparalleled a Faith, to argue for the same Priviledges to long Presumptuous Sin, inflexible Obstinacy, and insolent Contempt ? This is so far from *Judging righteous Judgment*, that it is not so much as *judging according to the Appearance*, For the Cases, as to what concerns the merits of the Cause, are not alike in any one Point. They resemble one another in nothing, but that both the Persons are dying. No Christian, who hath lived under the Dispensation of the Gospel, can, at the end of his Days, plead the same ready compliance to the Calls of Grace ; And no Man whatsoever can have an opportunity for exerting the same noble Faith,

Faith, because Christ could die but once, and his Sufferings and Shame only could have render'd the Penitent Thief's Confession so singularly glorious. This, I think, puts the *First* Branch of my Argument beyond dispute; *That* no late or dying Penitent can safely depend upon this Example, as a Precedent for the success of his own late Repentance; Because there are in This case some Circumstances, to which that of no Christian, no not of any other Man in the World, ever were, or can be, parallel. I proceed now in the

II. *Second* place to shew, *That, even in those parts of this Thief's Repentance, which are imitable by us, we cannot have the same Assurance of being pardon-ed and accepted.* We may possibly attain to his Contrition, and Godly Sorrow; to his Humility, and such a Degree of saving Faith, as our Condition will admit. But, allowing this to be possible, will it from thence follow, that we can be equally sure that we have actually attained to them? The sincerity of His Repentance is past a doubt, because He, who knows what is in the Heart of every Man, approved and

F 2 rewarded

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rewarded it. But we can only go upon Presumptions. The Comforts of our Friends, The Judgment of our Spiritual Guides, who would fain think the best, whom a false Representation of our State may mislead in their Opinion, or Charity and Compassion may dispose to pass a more favourable Sentence than we deserve; More than these we cannot have, except the Testimonies of our own Breasts; and our own Breasts too often flatter us (God knows) into a fatal Security, and *speak Peace, when there is no Peace.* For the *Heart of Man is exceeding deceitful, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?* And Who, the more he knows it, does not find still more reason to suspect it? Those, who argue for a late Repentance, place all the Efficacy of it in a Supposition; that the Person, if he had time and opportunity, would stedfastly persevere in, and faithfully make good, all his holy Purposes: But alas! how frequent instances have we of the Contrary? and Who shall dare to presume That to be his own Case, in which, if himself have not formerly failed, yet a multitude of pretending Penitents fail daily?
How

How many have we seen, who, if God had pleased to take them away while they seem'd to be in a good mind, had left behind them such hopes of their happy Condition, that it would be thought uncharitable and unchristian to question it ; and yet all this was not the Man's Heart, but his Fright ; a violence upon his Nature and settled Disposition ; The Fit of Sickness, and that of Zeal, abated and wore off together ; and as soon as the smart of the Rod was over, all the Remembrance and good Effect of it hath been over with them too. Thus many horrible Relapses have taught us to be cautious, how we give too easie credit to such false Appearances of Amendment any more ; since neither did We understand these Men, nor They truly understand themselves. Few Stomachs are so high and sturdy, but the Approach of Death, the Terrours of an incensed God, and the near prospect of a Gaping Hell, will bring them down. When Men are just upon the brink of Eternity, a new Scene opens upon them ; These things will then be seen and heard ; they intrude upon Mens thoughts whether they will or no ; and make quite

different Impressions, from what they did while at a distance, when Health and Strength, the Hurry of Business, and variety of Pleasures, helped to divert and drive away the uneasy Reflection. And, when Matters are come to this Extremity, Who is so nice, as truly to distinguish between the Hatred of Sin and the Dread of Punishment; between the Love of God and the Anxious care to preserve our selves; between the sorrow of the Penitent, and the amazement of his Fears, or the Melancholy of his Disease? These are so perplexed and intricate, that not only Others, but our Selves are exceeding apt to be confounded, and err, in our determinations concerning them. And yet These are all that we have to go upon in a Death-bed Repentance. Which at last amount to no more than this; that it does not become Us to set bounds to the Mercies of God, and therefore to Him we must leave them; for He knows them and We do not; and therefore, how well soever we may hope, yet we cannot pronounce any thing peremptorily concerning them.

Cold Comfort, God knows, and such as no Man in his right Wits would
take

take up with, in his Greatest, his Only Concern. Would Any of us be so stupid in the Affairs of this World, to content himself with a bare Possibility, in Matters of the last Importance, when he might have an absolute Certainty? Would We forego our Settlements, and abandon our selves to all the miseries of Want, by setting our whole Estate upon the hazard of an After-Game, nay of an Equal Chance, when we have it in our Choice to secure it against all the Power and Tyranny of Fortune? Yet thus and infinitely worse does every one, that hears me this day, play the fool, who ventures his Soul and Eternity upon a future or dying Repentance, the success of which can never be proved to him, while yet he may effectually and infallibly insure both by a speedy and present Repentance, which by producing worthy fruits will demonstrate its own sincerity, and prove its self. But why do I talk of an Even Chance, when the Odds are manifestly against us; for my last, and most mortifying Consideration of all, is

III. *Thirdly, That it is not only equally Possible, but highly Probable indeed,*

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deed, that when we come to dye, We may not be like this Thief upon the Cross, no not so much as in the Disposition and very Desire to repent. The Passage, of which my Text is a Part, gives us likewise an Example of a Wicked Man, dying hard and impenitent; and if This had not the same fate of being overlookt, which all things have that make against those corrupt Inclinations we delight to cherish, why should not That be as strong an Argument to warn us of our Danger, as the Other is pretended to be for the flattering our Security? Are not His contradicting and blaspheming Christ, as manifest instances of God's forsaking Men at their last hour, as this Man's acknowledging and praying to him can possibly be of their being converted and accepted at their last hour? The Examples of each kind make the matter equal, but the Reason of the thing is far from leaving it so; This ministers infinitely more ground of Fear than of Hope. For Repentance, as well as other Virtues, is the Effect of God's Grace; And, though Grace in the nature of the thing imply a Freedom of Distribution, yet, God hath

hath thought fit to suspend this Gift upon certain Conditions, and told us upon what Terms only we may, and upon what we have no right to expect it. That it shall be increased to them who use it diligently, but taken away from such as neglect and abuse the precious Talent, committed to their Improvement. And, if these be the Measures God hath fixed to himself, how can Those Men promise themselves any Safety, who have all along rejected the only Instrument of their Recovery? who have defied the Laws, and defeated all the Methods of God; resisted his repeated importunities, dared his vengeance, and now at last do not so properly leave their Sins, as they are left of them; Who begin to live well, when they think they can live no longer; and were not content to be turned over to God's Service, till Impotence, or Age, or Sickness, had rendred them incapable of doing the Devil's Drudgery? St. *Paul* hath read such People's destiny, by telling them (*Rom. II. 4. 5.*) that *they who despise the riches of his mercy, and forbearance, and long-sufferings, and do not consider, that the Good-*
ness

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ness of God leads to Repentance, treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath. So little Encouragement is there to think, that God will enable us to do that, when we come to dye, which we never would be perswaded to do, while we lived. So just occasion to apprehend, that the Railing and Obdurate Thief's Lot will be Ours. Since Obstinacy is what God hath provided no remedy against ; And They, who so pertinaciously chuse damnation, make too bold with God, when they look for miraculous and extraordinary Methods, to prevent their inheriting the portion of their Perverse Folly, and being filled with the bitter fruit of their own Devices.

By this time, I hope, you see how weakly They are entrenched, who fortify themselves in a sinful Course with the success of this Thief upon the Cross. And that, the whole Matter duly considered, they are utterly disarmed of their false confidences, and all their own Artillery is turned upon them. For this Passage does give us indeed a plain Example of a Man, who was given up to a reprobate Mind, and forsaken

faken of Grace at his last hour. But neither This, nor any Other passage of Scripture that I know of, furnishes One single instance which comes up to the Case of common Christians, by shewing us a Man rejecting and living impenitent under, the means of Grace, and then converted and saved at his last hour.

But what then is the proper Use to be made of this Passage, and where are the sweet, the so much extolled Consolations attributed to it? Even These; that it supports Men with an Instance, of a great and grievous Malefactor received into Grace, just at his leaving the World; Thus it teaches us, that no Impurities of Life, though never so foul, No Crimes though never so black, never so numerous, shut us out from Mercy, provided we sincerely repent; that the Grace of God can pluck back Wretches, when they are at the last gasp, and just dropping into everlasting Torments; but, as to actual Repentance it self, and such Grace being extended to those when they come to death's door, who have been headstrong and habitual Sinners all their days; the most that can be inferred from hence, is, that such a thing

thing *may* be ; but it gives us no manner of Security, nor so much as one probable Argument to conclude, that it certainly *shall* be. In a Word, Repentance, when true, is never too late, and therefore the Thief upon the Cross is a Sovereign Antidote against Despair : But Men may outstay the day of Grace ; they may not go about this Work till it be so late, that they have lost both the Will and the Power to repent ; and therefore this Example, when truly considered, is an excellent Preservative against Presumption too.

After this, would the Time and Your Patience admit me, I might hope to make some good Impression, by representing to You, The Unfitness of a Sick Bed or infirm Years for so long and laborious a Work as true Repentance is ; The danger of delaying it, from the Uncertainty of Life ; And the vain Sophistry of all those trifling pretences, whereby Men delude themselves in this important Affair. But I forbear, and only beg You to act in this, with the same prudence you would in matters of less moment. You
would

would not, if you knew a Medicine, which hath recovered thousands, and will infallibly cure, if applied in the beginning of the distemper, you would not in a mortal disease defer such an application till a Case of extremity, when never any that you know of was recovered by it but One, and His Symptoms too vastly different from Yours. You would not venture your whole Substance upon so mad a hazard, where there have been Millions of Blanks for One Prize; and that Prize too got by such a Chance, as can never come up again. Why will you then, with your Eyes open, run such a desperate risque of Eternity; *Eternity*, to which the longest Life bears not the proportion of a single moment? Why will you stake your Souls upon so certain a Loss; *Your Souls*, for which the whole World (could you gain it) is not an equivalent? If therefore you have any regard to these; As you would escape the agonies of Guilt, the horrors of Despair, and dreadful looking for of fiery Indignation to consume You; as You would secure peace of Conscience, the favour of God, and those comfortable

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fortable prospects of bliss, which alone can support your drooping Spirits when all worldly comforts forsake You; if there be any charms in the Hope of Heaven here, and the Enjoyment of hereafter; Let my Advice be acceptable to You;

But why do I call it Mine? 'Tis the Apostle's Advices, and most excellent and pathetical Exhortations those are,

- Hebr. III.
12. 13. *To day, while it is called To Day, harden not your hearts, Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief; but let us fear, lest a promise being made us of entring into his Rest, we should at last come short of it. Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of Salvation; And therefore, knowing that it is now high time to awake out of sleep, let us cast off the works of Darkness, and let us put on the armour of Light, now in the time of this mortal Life, Looking for and hasting to the Coming of the Day of God, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, to take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who shall be punished with everlasting*
- IV. 1.
- 2 Cor.
VI. 2.
- Rom. XIII.
11. 12.
- 2 Pet. III.
12.
- 2 Theff. I.
7. 8.

for a Death-bed Repentance. 127

*lasting destruction from the presence of
the Lord, and from the glory of his
power.*

To whom with the Father, and the
Holy Spirit, be all Honour and
Obedience, now and for ever.
Amen.

SER-

SERMON V.

St. PETER'S FALL.

St. Mark XIV. 72.

And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the Cock crow twice thou shalt deny me thrice, And when he thought thereon he wept.

AMong the many helps and advantages to a Godly Life, which the Holy Scriptures furnish us with ; None are more useful, none better qualified for success, than Those, which a prudent and considerate Reader may draw, from the Examples of eminent Saints recorded there. And These may be of Singular Benefit to us ; Not only by those shining Graces and Virtues, that exalted Piety, and unshaken Perseverance, which

which ought to provoke our Zeal and encourage our Imitation: But no less by those Blemishes and Failings, that Proneness to Sin even in the Best men, and the Diligence and Painfulness of that Repentance, by which they were restored to the Favour of God. Which should abate our vain Confidences, and awaken our Care. Of this latter sort is the Instance now before us, concerning *St. Peter*, whose Denial of our Saviour all the four Evangelists have given us a large and particular account of; and Three of them declare his bitter remorse of it. *St. Mark* in the Words of my Text, hath confined me indeed to this Last only; But because we shall be better able to make a right Judgment of his Repentance, when we have first considered the nature of the Crime that occasioned it; And in regard the One as well as the Other, may minister abundant Matter of Profit and Instruction; I shall, in treating of this Subject, take in the whole Compass of it, and discourse, as well of the Fault implied and referred to, as of the Repentance expressly contained, in my Text.

And here I cannot think it necessary to employ my own Pains or your Patience, in any Critical Niceties, which may tend to reconcile those seeming Differences between the several Gospels, in some Circumstances relating to this Affair; Which yet, to persons not very captious and perverse, are capable of a fair and easy Accommodation. But there is matter of far greater moment, which calls for our Attention. And the Substance, wherein they agree beyond all Controversy, is, that both St. Peter's Fault, and his Repentance, were very Great and Exemplary. He denied Christ, He did it to avoid being thought one of his Disciples, by the Servants of the High-Priest, He persisted in that Denial, He repeated and strengthened it with the Solemnity of Oaths and Curses: But when the Crowing of the Cock, and the Look of his Master had called up the Powers of Reason and Recollection in his mind; Immediately, upon reflecting what he had done, he went out and wept; He wept * *abundantly*, he wept bitterly.

* ἰμεράλιον
ἔλασσ.

These are the Passages, which we are principally concerned to take notice

tice of. And therefore I shall make it my endeavour,

I. *First. To represent to you St. Peter's Fall, with the most remarkable Circumstances and Aggravations attending it.*

II. *Secondly. St. Peter's Repentance, and the undoubted Testimonies given of the Seriousness and Sincerity of it.* And then under Each of these Heads I shall draw such Observations, as may be of use to us, to prevent our falling, or else to recover our standing, if we happen to fall, after his Example.

I. *First then. Let us consider St. Peter's Fault, and those Circumstances attending it, which may give us a true State of his Case.*

I. And here, *First* of all, it was undoubtedly one great Aggravation of this Fault, to have been committed by St. Peter. A Person, who had enjoyed the Benefit of a long and familiar Conversation with his Master; Who had not only heard the many excellent Instructions delivered to the Multitudes, which upon all occasions flocked together in great Numbers, to be

taught by him; but who, in private Conferences, had been let in to a more full and distinct Understanding of those Mysteries, which for wise Reasons had been exprest to the promiscuous Crowd of Hearers in Terms sometimes ambiguous and dark. A Person, who, besides the infinite Miracles wrought publickly in Confirmation of the Truth, had been admitted to be an Eye-Witness of such as more clearly and immediately gave Testimony to his Lord's Divine Nature and Authority. Such in particular as the Appearance of *Moses* * and *Elias*, at our Lord's Transfiguration; that *Honour* † and *Glory* which *Jesus* received from God the Father, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent Glory, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* Which voice from heaven, himself declares, he heard, when he was with him in the holy mount. A Person, whom our Lord had chosen the Companion || of his Agonies and Sufferings; and whose Negligence * and Security in time of Danger and Temptation, had been so kindly and so lately reprov'd. A Person so advanced in Knowledge,

* Matth.
XVII.

† 2 Pet. I.
17, 18.

|| Verf. 33.

* Verf. 37.

as to make that early Confession of his being * *the Christ the Son of God*, for * Matth. XVI. 16, which he received a particular Blessing and Commendation. A Person, who had been fore-warned of the extreme Peril of denying this Master, and told in very solemn manner † that *Whosoever should be ashamed of Him and his words in that adulterous and sinful Generation, and for such Shame should decline the confessing him before men; of Him also should the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in Glory with his Angels, and deny him at the last day before his Father which is in Heaven.* A Person, who in a due Sense of all this, had that very Evening professed himself ready to go with him both * *into Prison and to Death*, who seemed to take it ill, || that he might not bear him Company in all the painful steps of his Passion; Who was ready to lay down his Life for his Sake, nay to distinguish his Affection and Constancy above any of his Brethren, for *though all should be * offended because of his Master's Sufferings, yet would not he*; And therefore being, as he thought, abundantly resolved, and secure of himself in this Point, † *spake* † Verf. 31.

17.

† Mark VIII. 38.

* Luke XXII. 33.

|| John XIII. 37.

* Verf. 29.

† Verf. 31.

St. Peter's Fall.

the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee in any wise. Lastly, A Person who, according to his natural warmth of Temper, had not only committed himself to the Mercy of the Winds and Waves at Jesus Command, and received a most sensible and convincing Experiment of his Lord's Almighty Power, by being preserved from sinking; but, even in the midst of his Affliction, had just before given a rash and dangerous Proof of his Zeal, by drawing in his defence, and wounding one of the Officers, that came to apprehend him. And yet, Notwithstanding all this Knowledge and former Conviction, Notwithstanding such warning, and long experience, Notwithstanding all his boasted firmness of mind, and forward attempts to rescue so dear a Master; This very *St. Peter* fell off in time of Tryal, and denied and disclaimed all relation to, all knowledge of, that very *Jesus*. In all these respects then, the fault must needs be more heinous in *St. Peter*, than it would have been in any other Common Man; because it is a known and obvious Rule of Justice, that a Man's Guilt

Guilt in any case is to be measured in proportion to his advantages of doing better, the Resolutions that he will, and the Sense of his own Breast, that he ought to, behave himself otherwise. The greater Reason have we to enquire,

2. *Secondly*, What might be the Cause of St. Peter's Miscarriage in the Instance now before us. Now this, it is very plain, was his Fear: And Fear is a Passion so interwoven with Humane Nature; so immediately consequent upon that Principle of Self-Preservation, which seems to be the first and loudest Dictate of Reason; so apt to confound and overbear our Judgment, where it hath got Possession of the Soul; that no Infirmary prevails more strongly, or, when extreme and just, is more excused. Religion as well as Philosophy will, I think, admit *Tully's* distinction of *Metus qui cadere potest in constantem virum*: Some Apprehensions of Danger, from which the best and bravest minds are not exempted. And, where such Tryals fall upon men, as scarce any presence or firmness of Soul seems to be a match for, as we do not blame

but pity the unhappy Effects of Them who stand not the Shock ; so God, no doubt, who made us, and knows what we are able to bear, will not fail to compassionate, and make Gracious allowances for, such Failings. Had this been St. Peter's Case, it had been a mighty abatement to his fault. Had the Extremity, by which he was driven to it, been some sudden startling Accident, of which he had received no warning, could not have entertained any reasonable expectation, and consequently could not be supposed to make provision against ; much more might be alledged in his excuse, than now there can. Because This was a matter, which our Lord had so often foretold should certainly be ; and so earnestly enjoyned all his Disciples to look and to prepare for. The Violence of this Shock ought to have been prevented by those many Significations *, and the sharp rebuke to this Apostle in particular, for not crediting the bitter things foretold concerning himself : All which had been awakened again. and their memories refreshed by the † Discourse of that very Evening, while his Passion was drawing

* Matth.
XVI.

† V. 27,
&c.
John XIV,
XV, XVI.

ing on. St. * Peter had likewise been ^{*Matth. X.} told over and over, that Hatred and Persecution and Contempt must be the portion of the first Planters of the Gospel ; That they must follow their Master, in his Sufferings no less than in his Virtues: That they should be brought before Kings, and Rulers, and Synagogues for his Name's sake ; but even in this distress they were forewarned whom they † *ought to fear* ; ^{† Luke XII. 5.} not them that kill the Body, and after *that they have no more that they can do ; but Him only, who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into Hell.* This, one would imagine, might have inspired him with Courage, although he had been brought into the utmost hazards. But that was not now his Condition. He suffered nothing in his own person ; He only saw his Master suffer ; He only saw him suffer what he had frequently and punctually been told must of necessity be. And though such barbarous Treatment might threaten his Disciples, and shew them what they were to expect when it came to their turn ; Yet all this was at a distance. None of it as yet was begun ; St. Peter was not so much as taken

taken into Custody, He was not called before the High Priest, nor examined by any Officer or Person in Authority. Only some of the Inferiour Servants officiously put this Question; and He, who just before had withstood a band of armed men, is now so terrified with the impertinent Jealousies of a few insignificant Servants, and a poor silly Maid; that he labours to clear himself to Them with a most shameless falshood; * *I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest*; that is, My being with *Jesus* in the Garden, or retaining to him, is so far from having any truth in it, that I am absolutely a Stranger to Him, and to the thing you charge me with.

* Verf. 67,
68.

3. *Thirdly*, St. Peter did not content himself with making this Denial Once; but repeated and persisted in it. Whether Curiosity, or Affection rather, drew him to the High Priest's Palace, † *that he might see the End*, it is certain this unseasonable Officiousness placed him in the way of a Danger, which by his Absence might have been avoided. But even after his first Denial, he || Verf. 68. is said || *to have gone out*, and to have heard the Cock crow without any manner

† Matth.
XXVI.
58.

manner of Impression. So far from this, that he returns again, and mingles with the same Company. Fearing, probably, that withdrawing might increase their Suspicion; and chusing rather to intangle himself in the same snare a second time, and to gain credit by fresh and more obstinate denials; than to leave any Jealousy of his having said an Untruth before. And thus One Lye was added for a Confirmation to a former; and Each repeated with greater eagerness and vehemence, and in Terms more express and peremptory; till Three distinct denials had left him past the excuse of Slips in memory, or Inadvertency, or the Suddenness of a Surprise, which a single Denial might have received some Mitigation from. Nay

4. *Fourthly*, Which is yet a more grievous degree of Guilt, *St. Peter* bound these denials upon himself with voluntary Oaths and Curses, and used such Forms and such Solemnity, to get a most notorious Falshood believed, as were not lawful for him to have recourse to, in Confirmation of the Truth it self. And what could be
more

more dreadful, than thus to call God as a Witness, and to imprecate his Judgment upon his own head, in a thing so utterly false ? A thing, which he should have been so far from delivering himself from the Suspicion of ; that he ought to have esteemed it his Honour and greatest Advantage ; and to have owned his Discipleship to Christ, even at the utmost hazard, even at the certain expence, of his very Life. Such were the sad Circumstances of this Apostle's Fall ; So unworthy a Person of *St. Peter's* Eminence, Provoked by so slight an occasion in comparison of what might happened to him ; So obstinately false the Renouncings of his Master, so impious and blasphemous his Perjuries against him. All which I have thus represented before you, as the Evangelists themselves have done to the whole World, not with any envious design of lessening your Esteem for this glorious Saint, or any malicious Satisfaction that some People are apt to take, when they show the actions of others in their worst Light ; but that, by seeing this Action in its blackest Colours, we may profit by his Sin, be instructed by his Danger,

ger, and stand the faster for his Fall. To which purpose the Remainder of this Discourse shall be spent in such useful Reflections and Inferences, as the former Particulars, when rightly considered, give us great ground for, and plain Intimations of. And They are such as follow.

First, We read this Passage to very little Purpose, if it do not convince us of the miserable Frailty even of the Best Men, and effectually overthrow all those vain Confidences, which are apt to rise in our hearts, from our own supposed Strength and Virtue. For, What a lamentable instance is there now before our Eyes, of one of the Greatest men that ever was, falling in the most scandalous manner? Who shall hereafter dare to depend upon the highest degree of Knowledge, when One so wise, so perfectly satisfied in the Christian Truth, was yet, in despite of the fullest Convictions of his own Conscience, driven to deny and abjure the Lord that taught, the Lord that bought him? Who may presume upon his best Resolutions, when He, who declared so firm a purpose of adhering to *Jesus*, notwithstanding

standing any Terrours or Afflictions that could possibly befall him for such Perseverance, did yet within a few hours so preemptorily, so solemnly disown that very Person, for whom he so lately was ready to lay down his Life ; and so did that very thing which he but just before was disposed rather to die, than to do ? I say was *ready* and *disposed* ; For there is no doubt, but St. Peter at that time spoke the very Sense of his Soul, that he had an honest and sincere mind, and was stedfastly determined in his own Breast, and thought himself sufficient, to make good to the uttermost, what he with so much Piety and Affection intended and professed. But here was the Errour, Here the Misfortune, that St. Peter over-lookt the infirmities of humane Nature, and, in the warmth of his Zeal, promised more than he was able to perform. He relyed upon his own Integrity ; and thought, that good resolutions were an impregnable defence against the most violent Temptations. But when the Assault was made, and that danger drew up close to him, which he at a distance despised ; then the Event proved, that, how

how willing and well resolved forever the *Spirit* might be, yet the *Flesh* alas is but weak ; at the best exceeding frail and weak. And, if this Great Champion so soon gave ground, How shall We be able to stand in the Battel? We, who are Men as well as He, nay, who are Men not near so well appointed as He, for this Spiritual Combat? For We have all the same Principle of Corruption to betray us, the same Passions to bear us down ; but very Few of Us, (it is to be feared) have the same Knowledge and Wisdom, the same Courage and Resolution, the same Zeal and entire Love for our Master, that He had, to oppose against the Tryals, which make head against us. But Few of Us, I doubt, have the Grace, even in cold blood, to resolve that we would *die with Christ, rather than deny him in any wise*. And yet, even those that are never so serious and sincere in such purposes, know not what will become of them, when they are brought to the proof. We are, it may be, apt to blame or to pity this Apostle ; and may fancy, how much more valiantly we should have acquitted our selves under

under the like Difficulties ; But how extreamly vain all such Despisings of Others, or the Preferring our own Virtue before Theirs are, this sad Experiment instructs us. For He, who declared, that though *all should be offended yet would not He*, fell more shamefully than any of the rest, whose Constancy he suspected, and engaged so far to excel. That very Argument he went upon proved his ruine, and the Opinion of his own Strength was the true Reason, why he was so scandalously weak. So very dangerous it is to think our selves Something, when in truth we are Nothing. So fatal, to lean to our own Understanding, and be Wise, and Good, and Safe in our own conceits, when in reallity all our Sufficiency, all our Safety, is entirely of God. So much do even our Excellencies expose us, and such cruel Advantages does the Tempter take from our best Dispositions and Actions, if we grow too sensible of them, too well pleased with them, proud or careless upon their account ; If we impute them to our selves, if we ascribe the Success and Improvements we have formerly attained, to
our

our own Virtue ; and rely upon the Stedfastness of our own minds for a Security against future Tryals. So different a thing it is to defy Difficulties at a distance, and engage them hand to hand ; To gain imaginary Conquests, and triumph in the false and fanciful Notions of our own Strength, and to sustain the fatigues and hazards of the Field in good earnest. In a word, so mortifying an Example of Spiritual Security, is that baffled Apostle, who undertook for so much, and yet performed so very little ; So effectually did his own Experience teach Him, and so seasonably hath he admonished Us, * that They who are kept i Pet. I. 5 unto Salvation are kept through Faith, and by the Power of God. This alone is a Preservative sufficient against the Force and Subtlety of those Enemies, that labour our Destruction. There is a secret hand that works with us, and insensibly directs, and over-rules, and establishes our hearts. If we go right, it is because Grace steers our Course, and guides our weak unwary steps. If we chuse the better part, it is because God inclines our Wills. If we escape Temptations, it is owing to

an invisible watchful Guard, who puts by many a desperate Thrust, and shields us from all the Artillery discharged at us by the Prince of Darkness. If we maintain our Ground, when they assail us, it is, because God supports us with Courage, confirms our unstable Resolutions, and enables to persevere, and gives us Victory in the *Day* of Battel. Sustained by these Divine Succours, we are more than Conquerors; but when those are, either not lent at all, or drawn off again, we are miserable, and blind, feeble and naked, and become a cheap and easy Prey. And drawn off they will be, when men disregard Them, and depend upon themselves. For the proper Season of *God's Strength being manifested* is in *Our Weakness*, and we are strongest in effect, when most wretched and impotent in our own esteem. Had St. Peter's Apprehension of danger, and diffidence of his own abilities been greater, the issue of his Conflict had been less dishonourable. But by the inglorious defeat of a Leader so renowned and gallant for the main, God hath taught us, how wretched the Best of Men are, when left to stand upon
their

their Own bottom. That He, who builds upon any Attainments, any Excellencies merely Humane, must expect the Fate of a tottering and sandy Foundation ; and, that there is no Rock but Divine Grace, that can weather out the Shocks of Winds and Waves. That, in all our Spiritual Encounters it is the safest and the prudentest thing we can do, to distrust our own Abilities, to watch and pray ; To watch diligently, because we are frail and apt to be overtaken ; To pray fervently, because without our asking we cannot obtain that Assistance, which if we fail of, we are unavoidably vanquished. And therefore, if at any time we come off with Honour and Success, *Not unto Us, O Lord, not unto Us, but unto thy Name be the Praise.* For we are not able to stand before the mighty force that cometh against us, neither is it *our own Arm that helpeth us ; But thy right hand, and thy Arm, and the Light of thy Countenance, because thou hast a favour unto us.* In short, My Brethren, We can do nothing of our selves, but are able * to do all *things, through Christ that strengthens us ;* and therefore can never trust

* Philip
IV. 13. 3

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Our

Our Selves too little, or Him too much.

2. *Secondly*, Let us from this Example learn to consult our Safety, by keeping, as much as is possible, out of the way of Temptation. St. Peter seems to have run himself into Danger, by an unseasonable Instance of Affection for his Master; and Many well intending men are in like manner entangled in difficulties, by giving rash and hazardous Proofs of their Zeal. We are commanded to pray, *that God would not lead us into Temptation*, but all Prayer supposes our own endeavours to obtain the Blessing we pray for. And therefore we must not expect to be heard, if we lead our selves into Temptation, and rush upon Mischiefs which we might avoid. There are but very few of so confirmed a Virtue, as to be fit to bid the Enemy Battel, or to hold out against great and hazardous Encounters; and therefore the surest Course is to act altogether upon the Defensive; to look well before us, and stand at a distance. Little do men consider what they do, when they indulge themselves in the Approaches to Sin, and venture to play upon

upon the Brink of the Precipice. While we are cool, and nothing discomposes our Spirits, we are apt to take false measures of our Abilities; and fondly to imagine, that we shall be capable of the same just Reasonings and regular Management, in the heat of Action, as we find before we come to engage. But alas! when once the Fight begins we are quite other men; All is presently Rout and Confusion; Our Minds are disordered, our Passions enflamed, our Sufferings press hard upon Flesh and Blood, our Fears or our Pleasures bear down upon us, and, in despite of all our boasted Valour, we give ground. It is therefore a necessary effect of Distrusting our own Strength urged in my Last Particular; that we run as few Risques, as possibly we can: That we labour, as much as may be, to subdue our Passions, and even, when we seem to have them in most absolute Subjection, that we provoke them not to rise in Rebellion against us: That we ask and improve the Grace of God to the utmost of our Power; but, when we are endued with it most plentifully, that we put it upon no desperate Experiments.

The Conduct of a Wise and Good Christian is like that of a Peaceable Prince, who gets himself Glory by maintaining his own Territories in Quiet and good Order, rather than by affecting to enlarge them at the expence of Blood and Treasure; and the unnecessary Danger of losing his Own, while he makes War upon Others. When the Providence of God brings Tryals upon us, (Which it does when our Prayers and Prudence cannot prevent them) We may reasonably hope, that this Grace will be magnified, in our rescue from Difficulties of his own sending. But there is not the same Assurance due to those Troubles, which our own Forwardness, and Indiscretion involves us in. For God hath no-where promised to work Miracles for our Deliverance, nor engaged to save Them who are not careful to save themselves. And therefore we must use all possible Caution; and decline as much as may be all hazardous accidents. We must not court opportunities of distinguishing our Christian Bravery, when our Duty does not call us to it. Our Lord hath commanded us to take up our Cross, when

when he lays it in our way ; but he hath not commanded, that we should go out and seek it, nay, or that we should meet it, when we can pass by another way, and honestly and with a good Conscience escape from it. He hath promised to *succour them that are tempted*, that is, such as are purely passive in the thing. But when Men break their Ranks, and, without Orders from their Commander, will needs march up as it were to the mouth of a loaded Cannon, by turning their own Tempters ; This is not Courage but Foolhardiness. And whatever Expectations these Men may cherish of God's Assistance in such Cases, they are not the Effects of a vigorous Faith and well grounded Trust, but of a blind and hot-headed Presumption. For all the Promises of Grace, and our Belief of them, suppose the Use of proper Means ; And of those means the First and Best is, To prevent our danger. And, as no Man in his Senses would venture the breaking a Leg or an Arm in Confidence of his Chirurgeon's Skill to set it again : So neither will any considerate Christian lay himself open to Sin, or make needless Approaches

toward it, because he knows that God is more powerful to preserve, than the Devil can be to destroy. For it is not the Power of God that is our Security, but the Knowing that he will exert that Power on our Behalf. And this we cannot know, but rather the direct contrary, when the Temptation is our own act and deed. For the dangers, which We chuse, have no right to his Protection; and it is a righteous thing with Him to suffer such men as wantonly set their Souls at stake, to *eat the bitter fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own foolish devices.*

3. *Thirdly*, The Wariness I have been advising to keep aloof from Temptation may yet be farther inforced, by considering, from this Instance of the Apostle before us, how the Commission of one Sin draws us on to more and greater. Thus He, after One denial, proceeded to a Second and a Third, and did not stick to strengthen them with false Oaths and horrid Curses. And thus, in Other cases, when men have once let go their hold, they are carried as it were down the stream, and let themselves drive, till at last they sink into the grossest Impieties.

Impieties. This is the natural effect of sinful Acts; that they quickly grow into Habits, weaken and waste the Conscience, harden men by Custom, and by degrees destroy their very Principles. But especially, when they suffer themselves to do an ill thing for the escaping some present Inconvenience, if then they feel their Danger continue or increase, they imagine themselves under a necessity of growing bolder as they are more press'd. And, having gone too far to retreat with Honour or Safety, endeavour to disengage themselves by more grievous and obstinate degrees of Sin. There is not in the whole World a more abandoned Wretch, than He that is forced to drudge on in a Course of Wickedness, by the difficulty and the shame of retracting his former Errours. No man knows what such an embroyled State will grow to, or where the Man will stop. That Principle which should have preserved him is given up; and when the Reproaches of his own mind are broken through, he lies at the mercy of every fresh Temptation, and wants only opportunities of becoming every day worse and more profligate

profligate. And This is very observable, as in all other cases, so particularly in the case of Lying, which comes nearest to *St. Peter's* in my Text. How confidently men will stand in defence of Falshood, and what pains they often take to gain Credit, by repeating and confirming what they have said or done amiss; and how quickly this settles into a habit of Falshood, till they seem at last to have lost and laid aside all regard to Honesty and Truth, the Checks of Conscience, or the Vengeance of Almighty God: And, yet the Event at last is like that of *St. Peter's* Denials here; to entangle themselves faster in the snare; and the more they struggle to get quit of their Difficulties, the more to aggravate their Sin, and expose their Reputations. So that, after all, the wisest and safest, as well as the shortest Course, is to stick fast to our Duty. For Truth and Honesty will carry us through, where all the Shifts and Shufflings of wicked Craft will forsake and betray us. And it were well, if Servants, and Children, and such as are under Authority; or indeed Any, who lie under the fears of danger or displeasure, would observe

serve this matter duly. For, besides the great Offence which lying Excuses are to Almighty God, every Master, or Person with whom we have to deal, cannot but think the Fault and Provocation doubled by this means. And no Man of Reason or common Sense, can suppose himself secure of our Faithfulness to his Service or Interest, if he discover in us a disposition, upon every slight occasion, to deal indirectly ; that we make no bones of sacrificing Truth to Respect, and being unfaithful to the Witness within our own Breasts, and our great Lord and Master in Heaven.

4. *Fourthly*, From hence we may be able to satisfy our selves of the Wisdom and Goodness of God, in causing the Faults and Infirmities of his Saints, to be recorded in Holy Scripture, and the Use we ought to make of their Failings and Temptations. Not to flatter our selves in any manner of Evil, as if We might notwithstanding be dear and acceptable to God. For these men were so upon the account of their Eminent Virtues, and their as Eminent Repentance, where they did amiss ; Otherwise the Threatning in *Ezekiel* had

Ezek.
XVIII. 24.

had been their Portion, *All their former Righteousness should not have been mentioned in the Day of Account, but in the trespass and the Sin which they have sinned, in these they should have died.* But This was done for a seasonable Warning, and to be an effectual Humiliation to all future Ages ; by letting us see, that the most Perfect of Men are still but Men ; Subject to mighty Blemishes and Imperfections ; and that the highest and most purified State we can possibly arrive at in this World, is no Security from Danger. This should make us very tender, how we judge and despise our Brethren ; Whose Faults, how severely soever we may think fit to censure, it is highly probable would be our own ; were Their Circumstances and Their Temptations Ours. This also confutes the Imagination of Some, who teach, that They, who have true Faith and true Grace, can never fall from it. An Opinion extreamly false, and groundless. For What is true Faith and true Grace, if that Confession of St. Peter did not shew it, which our Lord so highly commended, declared he would build his Church upon, and pronounced him

him Blessed for ? And What is Falling from such Grace and Faith, if the obstinate repeated denying, and abjuring of Christ be not ? These Instances therefore of such Worthies mis-carrying so grossly ring in our Ears those Admonitions of St. Paul, *Be not high-minded but fear, and Let Him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall, and If a man be overtaken in a Fault, restore such a one with the Spirit of Meekness considering thy self, lest thou also be tempted.* They forbid us to promise our selves Safety and Freedom from Temptation in any Circumstances of humane Life ; Or so far to presume upon our former Virtues, as to think our selves incapable even of the blackest Vices, if God should withdraw his Grace from us, and leave us to our own poor Powers, and unwary Measures. They awaken our Care, mortify our Vanity, and remind us of our Dependance upon a Higher Power, and to give Him the Acknowledgments due for all the Good we do, and for all the Evil we do not. And, as they admonish, so do they comfort us too, by shewing, that God does not utterly cast off

Rom. XI.

20.

I Cor. X.

12.

Gal. VI. 1.

off his Servants, no not when they offend very grievously and scandalously. That we need not, ought not to despair, though our Transgressions be very many, very heinous, since there is still Room left for second and better Thoughts; And, provided Men return and endeavour to make amends for their past Offences, they shall be kindly received, and freely pardoned. And therefore, when we read This and the like Passages, we must be sure not to stop in the midst, but take in the whole Relation, and observe the Character throughout. For St. Peter's Fall will minister just ground of Comfort, to None, but such as are careful to rise with him again. His Sin indeed is a Warning to us, but his Repentance is no less a Pattern. They that blame his Sin, will do well to observe his Sorrow; and if they abhor the One, they will not perhaps find it so easy to imitate the Other. Let us remember, that there are several ways of denying God and Christ, and St. Paul expressly says, *They do it in works* and in effect, who do not live according to what they believe. This I am afraid Few, if Any
of

of us can purge our selves wholly of ; and therefore, since our guilt is not far from *St. Peter's*, but only doing the same thing after another fashion ; it will be necessary, that our Concern and Reformation should come up as near to His, as the nature of the Fault does. In order whereunto, My second Head proposes to treat of *St. Peter's* Repentance. And that (God willing) shall be the Business of my next Discourse.

SERMON VI.

St. Peter's Repentance.

St. Mark XIV. 72.

And Peter called to mind the Word that Jesus said unto him ; Before the Cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.

FROM these Words I proposed to treat of Two General Heads.

- I. First, *St. Peter's Fall, which is implied and referred to in the Text, and*
- II. Secondly, *His Repentance, which is expressly contained in it.*

Concerning the Former of these, I have already spoken at large ; And shall now proceed to the Latter ;
St.

St. Peter's Repentance. And here I shall observe the same method as before: 'Considering carefully the several Steps and Parts of this Repentance in the *first* place; and then drawing from this Example such Reflections as are proper to the Occasion, and may be useful to all Christians in general, More especially to Such, whose unhappy Engagements in a sinful Course have rendred a very deep and solemn Repentance necessary, for restoring them to the Favour of an offended God.

I. *First* then, Let us consider this Repentance so far as St. Peter himself was concerned in it. And here it may be convenient to take notice of the *Four* following Particulars. Which, though not all expressed in the words before us, yet are to be gathered plainly, from the Relations which the other Evangelists have left us concerning this Matter.

I. Now the *First* thing observable here, is That, which gave the occasion to this Change. And This we are told by all the Evangelists was the Crowing of the Cock. But St. Mark hath informed us * particularly, that * Vers. 68.

M

St.

St. *Peter* had heard him Crow once before, without any manner of Impression. And therefore St. *Luke* gives us a very good Intimation, how the Repeating it a Second time came to be more effectual than the First. For this Evangelist is singular in one Circumstance, mentioned (*Ch. XXII. 61.*) *The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter then remembered the word of the Lord, &c.* So that this Glance of our Lord upon St. *Peter* falling in so seasonably with that Crowing of the Cock, awakened his mind, and made him attend to that Signal of his Duty, that Remembrancer of the fault our Lord had foretold, and He had so sadly fulfilled. This then so backed, so sent home to his Conscience put him upon the *Second* thing remarkable,

2. Which is, His own Recollection. *He remembered the word that Jesus had said,* and found, by comparing his own Behaviour with it, how shamefully he had fallen from his boasted Courage and Constancy; How frail and unstable his strongest Resolutions had proved; How much better our Lord understood him, than he understood himself; How very quickly, and easily

easily he had been betrayed into a Crime, of which he could not believe himself capable ; How base he had been to so kind a Master ; How false to his own purposes ; How regardless of Truth, How peremptory in a most notorious Falshood ; How profane in the Oaths and Curses, by which he had bound it upon his Conscience. For by this Remembrance, and Thought, no doubt is intended a Representing to himself the Offence he had committed, in its blackest Colours ; and loading it with all the dreadful Aggravations, which of right belonged to it. All which, when set before him, proved so frightful a Spectacle, that he could no longer refrain from Tears ; for that is the

3. *Third* Circumstance observable in his Behaviour. When he *thought thereon he wept*, or as some understand it, he burst out into Tears immediately : Intimating hereby both the Suddenness, and the Extremity of his Grief ; Such as sought a convenient place to give it self free vent in ; and therefore *he went out and wept bitterly*.

Without entring into the Dispute, what may be the properest Interpreta-

* ἐμεταλάνθην
ἁμαρτίας.

tion of those words by which St. *Mark* * hath described this Action, it is sufficiently manifest, that St. *Peter's* Reflection upon what he had done produced in him this Sorrow, and that his Sorrow was very serious and hearty. The inward Horrors of his mind expressing themselves by the abundance of his Tears, and all other Marks of bitter Remorse, which we can suppose his Condition to require, or be capable of. And This must needs have been more than can be easy for us to conceive. For the Anguish of a wounded Spirit is no more to be described, than it is to be born. And in St. *Peter* every thing conspired to increase this Confusion. For, besides the many particular Circumstances, that heightened his Guilt, and embittered the Remembrance of so foul an Offence; the very Kindness of his Master, who in the midst of Contumelies and Sufferings seem'd to forget himself a while, and had a Compassionate Look in reserve to reclaim Him, must needs have added a great deal to his Astonishment and Concern. There being nothing more apt to soften and melt a Man's heart down, and reduce him to an effectual Sense

Sense of his own Vileness and Ingratitude, than some very undeserved Kindness of a Person, whom he hath heinously injured. And what greater Indignity could *St. Peter* put upon his Lord, than thus to disown and abjure him? What greater Kindness could our Lord shew to this revolting ungrateful Man, than, by the silent but significant Rebuke of his Eye cast that way, so opportunely to call him back to himself? And what could cut *St. Peter* more to the quick, than such an Instance of Mercy and Tenderneſs? Such as shewed a greater Concern for his Disciples Sin, than for all the Injuries and Insolence of his Enemies to himself; Such as declared, though that wicked Servant had disclaimed his Master, yet that He was so gracious, as not even thus to discard and forsake Him. This, I make no doubt, was one of the bitterest Ingredients in *St. Peter's* Sorrow; and that which confirmed him in his Duty ever after, as much as any other Consideration whatsoever.

4. And this puts me in mind of a *Fourth* thing very necessary to be observed (which, though not mentioned here, yet is abundantly evident from

other Passages. of the New Testament) and that is, the Thorough Change wrought in St. Peter by this Godly Sorrow; and the ample Amends he afterwards made for all the Dishonour this Denial of Christ could possibly reflect upon Himself, his Master, or the Christian Religion. For, immediately after our Lord's Resurrection, we find the same ardent Affection flaming out again as bright as ever. This * once dismayed St. Peter, did then cast himself into the Sea, out of Impatience to hasten to Jesus upon the Shore; He put himself forward † on the Day of Pentecost, and, with undaunted Zeal, asserted the Resurrection and Divinity of that Saviour, whom he had formerly denied. He || maintained his Point against the Jewish Rulers, despised their Rebukes and angry Menaces, and plainly told them, that *God was to be obeyed rather than Men*, and therefore whatever it cost him, He could not forbid himself, publicly declaring the Truths which he had seen and heard. He * strengthened the Brethren by his resolute Behaviour, led them on bravely, and took all possible care to keep them from shrinking at the Terrours of

* John
XXI. 7.

† Acts II.
14.

|| Acts IV.
19, 20.

* Acts IV.
23. 1st and
2d Epist.

of Persecution. He persisted in his preaching, and when the Enemies of the Faith were not to be reasoned out of their malice, most willingly offered his Person to scourging and Imprisonment; * *rejoycing that he was counted* ^{* Acts V. 40, 41.} *worthy to suffer shame for the once abjured Name of Jesus*: He was the Mark of Envy and Rage, singled † out by He- ^{† Acts XII. 4.} *rod* for a Sacrifice, that would above all others content the *Jews*; And therefore was intended to gratify their Spight, by making his Death add to the Triumphs and solemn Rejoycings of their Passover. And, though God saw fit to disappoint that Design, and reserve him for more and greater Services to the Christian Cause; yet did he at last glorify him, by the same kind of Tortures and Death, which his ^{|| John XXI. 18,} Master condescended to undergo; nay, ^{19.} St. Peter gladly received the notice of this from Christ's own mouth. So that St. Peter was not more different from himself, when trembling at the Voice of a silly Damsel; than the same St. Peter afterwards, the Glorious, the Invincible Apostle, before the Council, in Prisons, and upon the Cross, was from the Cowardly, the Infamous Re-

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negade in the High Priests Hall. This settled and deliberate Fidelity was a noble Compensation for the Infirmary, and Fears, and violent Transport of his Fall. This shewed what the Man was, when perfectly himself, and supported by the Grace of God; As the Other did, what he was, when naked and destitute of Heavenly Succours; depending upon his own Strength, and left in the hand of his Passions. This restored him to Favour, and hath established his Honour to all Eternity. And we should not have done right to *St. Peter* in handling the Case now before us, should these last and Finishing Scenes of his Life have been omitted. Because whatever he had done amiss through Frailty and hurry, he thus undid again, in cool, and staid, and deliberate Acts. And, since Repentance is an Alteration of the Man, of his whole Temper, and Behaviour; I thought my self bound to set before you some of those Instances, which the Holy Ghost hath left upon Record, of the Efficacy and Sincerity of this Man's Repentance. And Bound indeed I esteem my self, not only in Justice to the Memory of this Eminent Apostle,

Apostle, but for Your sakes too ; in regard of those Uses and Instructions that are capable of being drawn from hence. For That is the next thing I am now applying my self to ; The making some Reflections upon St. Peter's Repentance, of which all Christian's may profit themselves, who read and consider it with serious and due Attention.

I. And *First*, From the Consideration of this Instance before us, it will be no hard matter to possess our minds with a right Notion of the Promises of God to Good Men, with regard to Temptations. He hath not engaged, that our Virtue shall never be brought into hazard ; for This would prevent the Proofs of our Fidelity to him, which is chiefly seen in our Constancy under those Tryals that endanger it. And therefore in this case we are to support our Spirits, with those Assistances of his Grace, which may enable us to resist Temptations. Nay, he hath not assured us, we shall always be successful in our Resistance, when thus assaulted ; but thinks it sufficient Encouragement, that, if through the Infirmary of our Corrupt Nature, and the

* Luke

XXII. 32.

the Violence of our Temptations, we happen to be overcome and fall into Sin, his Grace shall not be wanting to raise us again by Repentance. Thus our Lord tells St. Peter, * that he had *prayed for him that his Faith might not fail*; that is, that he might not fall away finally. His Faith we see did fail for a Season; for such peremptory Denials of our Lord could not be consistent with that saving Principle. But That, which received so terrible a damp by this Interruption, was not utterly lost and extinguished in his mind. The Distemper in its own Nature was Mortal, but, by the Power, and Skill, and timely Application of his Spiritual Physician, it received a perfect Cure. Christ therefore did not pray for the Prevention of his Sin, but for his Conversion from, and Amendment after it. And this was every whit as much for the Benefit of the Patient, and the Honour of the Divine Grace, as the preserving him in perfect Health and Soundness could possibly have been. Nay, more indeed, both for the One and the Other. For the greater the Danger was, the more clearly does the Sovereign Virtue and Efficacy

Efficacy of the Remedy appear. The Grace of God is never so conspicuous, never triumphs so gloriously over the Powers of Satan, as when it revives wretched Offenders from the *Death of Sin unto the Life of Righteousness*. And the grievous Miscarriages of Good Men are often so ordered, as to turn to their mighty Advantage. For These have a natural Tendency to awaken their care; they make them more sensible of their own Weakness and Danger, and more vigilant to prevent it for the time to come, than otherwise they would have been, if their own Experience had not taught them, upon what slippery Ground they stand. They dispose them to be more tender and compassionate to their Brethren; more gentle and sparing in their Censures; more ready to forgive what is done amiss; more diligent to contribute their endeavours for the rescuing and *restoring such in the Spirit of Meekness*; when they reflect how easy it is to be overtaken, and how prone All, even the Best Men, are to offend. And they kindle in such Penitents a vigorous and active Zeal, to make amends for the scandal of a bad Example,

ple, by a stricter Holiness, and brighter Virtues for the time to come. So little reason is there, that we should be delivered from all Temptation, or be secured from sinning when we are tempted ; when the Consequences both of the One and the Other may be, and often are, so managed by the Wisdom and Goodness of Providence, as not only not to destroy or impair the Piety of private Men, but, with the Increase of That, to become Instruments of Greater Good : More effectual to our own Salvation ; More serviceable to the Glory of God and his Grace ; and More beneficial to Religion in general, than if Good Men had never been tempted, or never fallen at all.

2. *Secondly*, As St. Peter's Fall confutes the Errour of Those, who hold, that men who once have true Grace cannot lose it, so St. Peter's Rising again proves, that such as have had the Unhappiness to lose Grace, may be restored and recover it again. And this overthrows the *Novatian* Heresy, which consisted in affirming, that there is no remission to be had for Sins committed after Baptism, and against which the Sixteenth Article of our Religion is directly

rectly levelled. An Errour, in all Appearance, chiefly owing to the mistaken Interpretation of two Texts to the *Hebrews*, which have created great perplexity to ignorant and unwary Souls. *The first is that in (Heb. VI. 4, 5, 6.) It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away to renew them again unto repentance. The other (Heb. X. 26, 27.) If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more Sacrifice for Sins: But a certain fearful looking for of Judgment and fiery Indignation, which shall devour the Adversaries. Now for a right Understanding of these Passages, we are to observe these Three things.*

I. *First, That the Scripture often expresses that by Impossible which is extremely difficult: Or which is impossible for humane Strength only, but not so to Nature assisted by Divine Grace. And thus our Blessed Saviour explains himself concerning Rich * Mens. en-tring into the Kingdom of God; by saying, that though this be impossible with regard*

* Matth.
XIX. 26.

regard to the Corruptions and Temptations of such Persons, and any Power of their own to resist, and vanquish them, yet * *the things that are impossible with Men are possible with God.* He may, by the prevailing influences of his Grace, wean their hearts from the World, and effectually dispose them to accept such Terms of Salvation, as of themselves they would never incline or submit to. And thus, though men who reject and quench the Holy Spirit by wilful Sin, cannot renew themselves, yet God can give them the Heart and Power of Repentance and Renovation.

2. *Secondly*, The Apostle, addressing himself to *Jews*, speaks with allusion to the Law of *Moses*, which, though it allowed of Sacrifices for the Expiation of Involuntary Sins, such as proceeded from Ignorance or Infirmary, yet did not make the like Provision for wilful, and deliberate, and presumptuous Offences. But that This is not to be so strictly taken, as if the Christian Dispensation had made no Provision for even such neither, is evident from that Argument, * whereby
 * A&XIII. 38, 39. the same Apostle proves the Excellence
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of Ours, above the Levitical Institution. *Be it known unto you, that through this man (Jesus Christ) is preached unto you Forgiveness of Sins ; And by Him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the Laws of Moses.* If therefore men might, even by the Law of *Moses*, be justified from those Sins which were not wilful ; and if by Faith in Christ men may be justified from all things, which by the Law of *Moses* they could not be justified from ; It follows, that, by the Evangelical Covenant, even Wilful Sins are capable of a pardon in them that believe. I say, *in them that believe*, for, to remove this Difficulty effectually, we must observe,

3. *Thirdly*, That those Texts to the *Hebrews* are meant, not of every sort of wilful Offenders, but of such as revolt and fly off entirely from the Faith and Profession of the Gospel. For which reason they are branded with the Titles * of *Adversaries*, and such as crucify * Heb. X. the Son of God afresh, trample him under 27, 29. foot, count the blood of the Covenant an unholy thing, and do despight to the Spirit of Grace. And these men, to be sure, it is impossible to renew, while

while they continue in their Apostacy : Because they have cast off their only Remedy. For Faith is the indispensable Condition of Pardon, *All that believe are justified*, says St. Paul ; But this Faith They have renounced and disclaimed ; and consequently are not within the Covenant, nor under the Influence of Grace, or the Possibility of Benefit from the Sacrifice of that Blood, which they esteem *Common* and no *Sacrifice at all*. But the Case is far otherwise with Them, who are engaged in a sinful Course, and yet have not thrown off the Foundation of Christianity. They may see their Folly, and acknowledge the merit of their Saviour's Atonement ; They may comply with the good motions of that Spirit, which they too long have quenched and resisted, though they have not formally disavowed and done publick despight to him. There is a mighty difference, between walking unworthy of the Christian Faith, and being formal and open Adversaries to it ; Between a Conversation unbecoming the Gospel, and Principles that professedly overthrow the Gospel. And consequently, Those Passages of Scripture,

ture, which strike at the One of these, and declare it incapable of Forgiveness; need not, must not be so applied to the Other, as to exclude from all Hope and Comfort, a Case so very distant from the former.

Thus much however must be acknowledged, for a Terrour to all who shall presume to sin with a high hand ; that the more wilful any Man's Offences have been, the harder he will find it to repent, and the greater reason he hath to dread the being forsaken by God, and given up to a Reprobate mind. For God is so far provoked in some cases, as not to afford that Grace, which is effectual to Repentance ; when obstinate and hardened Wretches have long abused and withstood it ; Whereas he shews himself more tender and easy to be reconciled, to those who have Ignorance or Infirmary to plead in Mitigation of their Faults. A notable Instance whereof we shall do well to observe in *St. Peter* and *Judas*. For, though both were guilty of mortal Sin, yet the Quality of their Facts was as different, as the Event of them. *St. Peter* indeed denied our Lord basely,

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obstinately, blasphemously. But how came he to do it? He knew he ought not, he resolved he would not, he came full of that Resolution ; But the Terror of his Master's Sufferings, and the Violence of his own Fears so confounded him, that he had not his thoughts and judgment at liberty ; As soon as ever he was restored to the use of his reason, he checked and condemned himself most severely for what he had done. The fault was begun, and ended, and lamented, and all in the space of an Hour or Two ; And this short defection was compensated by the most resolute Confessions of *Jesus* all his Life after. So that, though This were a very grievous Crime, yet there was something to extenuate the heinousness of it. His Will was not principally and primarily concerned, it moved not of it self, but was over-born by his Affections. And this action ought in equity to be imputed, to a distemper of Passion, rather than to any settled Sense of his mind. Had he been cool, and sedate, and perfectly at his own disposal, we should have seen him quite another Man. And therefore *Jesus* had a kind

kind reproving look in store for Him, and mercifully allowed for those Infirmities, with which the partaking of our Nature had made him so intimately well acquainted.

But we read of no such Grace extended to *Judas*, nor was there in Him the same pitiable Circumstances to incline it. He laboured under no difficulties, from which his Treachery might seem a necessary Expedient to deliver him. His only Temptation was the Naughtiness and sordid Covetousness of his own mind; His Wickedness was a Work of Deliberation and long Contrivance, and solemn Debate; He consulted with the High-Priests and Elders, of the Time, the Place, and every Circumstance for the most convenient Execution of his Villany; He set his own Soul and his Master's Life to sale at a vile price; continued his attendance upon that Master still; that so, under the disguise of Friendship, and by such laboured Hypocrisy, he might the better carry on his design of destroying him. And, when his Project was thus formed, he had many broad hints given him, that *Jesus* had detected his

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designs,

* Matth.
XXVI.24.

designs ; many warnings of the Sin and Danger he was running into ; and, *that it * had been better for him if he had never been born ;* And yet none of these altered his purpose. So that in this Act of Judas there were all the Characters of a Malice præpense, a settled inflexible Resolution to do wickedly. This was intirely the Work of his Will ; And Such a one, as plainly shewed him to have cast off all Faith in Christ ; To intend, as much as could be, the utter overthrow of Him and his Doctrine, and to have been what our Lord calls him, † a Devil. And accordingly, The Regret he afterwards felt, seems rather to have been the effect of Confusion, and Rage ; than any godly Relenting ; the Agonies of Frenzy, and Amazement, and Despair, which are most distant things in the World from that sober and regular Sorrow, which * worketh Repentance unto Salvation not to be repented of.

* 2 Cor.
VII. 10.

The design of this Comparison is to beget in all that hear me a just abhorrence of all Wilful Sin ; that None of us may dare to act, deliberately and in cold Blood, those things which
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our Reason and our Conscience tell us ought not to be done. For, though the case of every wilful, no nor of every habitual Sinner, be not so desperate as that of *Judas*; Yet we may from hence be sensible, that where men offend with a high hand, and in defiance, as it were, to the Commands of God, and the Checks of their own breasts; Where they proceed leisurely, and have space and opportunities to recollect themselves; Where they continue long in wicked practices, and are deaf to all Admonitions, which should pluck them back; These men contract a very deep guilt; are much harder to be reclaimed; and may reasonably fear, that they provoke God to withdraw those Assistances and Restraints of Grace, which are necessary to their Amendment. And therefore *David* very wisely prays to be kept * *from presum-* * *Psal.*
ptuous Sins, lest they should get the Do- *XIX. 13.*
minion over him, and calls these the Great Offence, such as is most displeasing to Almighty God, and which he will not be easily pacified for. And if so deep a Remorse, if such bitter Tears, were thought by St. Peter little enough for a Sin of Infirmity;

What measure of these must needs be due, where the Will acts more freely, and the Choice of Evil is the Effect of Obstinacy and Perverseness, and a Contempt of our Duty? Certainly the least we can think fit in such wretched Circumstances, is to take good heed, that none of those Qualifications be wanting, in Our Repentance, which rendered that of *St. Peter's* so successful. And therefore the Last thing I shall do upon this occasion, shall be to shew, wherein this Repentance of *St. Peter* is, and ought to be, a Pattern to all returning Sinners.

3. To which purpose I observe, *Thirdly*, that we are bound to imitate Him in these following Particulars.

1. *First*, In ascribing the very Disposition to repent to the Grace and Favour of Almighty God. Some of the Fathers have not unfitly resembled the Crowing of the Cock to the Outward, and the awakening Look, which *Jesus* cast upon *St. Peter* to the Inward, Call to Repentance. By the Outward Call I mean, such as the Preaching of the Word, the Advice of our Friends, the Reproofs of those in Authority, the merciful or the severe Dispensations of
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of Providence, inviting or driving men to better Courses. By the Inward, those kindly and seasonable, and secret Operations of the Holy Spirit, which incline and give a right turn to our Minds, and cause the Outward means to make a due Impression upon us. Now as the *first* Crow of the Cock had no effect upon *St. Peter*, because *Jesus* did not then turn upon him; so these Outward Calls are very often unsuccessful, because not seconded and sent home by that Grace of God, which alone can give them power to prevail for our Reformation. And, as the Efficacy of the *Second* Crowing was immediate and strong, when attended with that rebuking Glance of our Blessed Master; so, where those Outward means are backed with the Inward Influences of the Spirit, there they produce sudden and wonderful Alterations. For what reasons God vouchsafes this Inward Call to Some and not to Others, who all partake equally of the Outward Call, is best known to his own Infinite Wisdom. Nor is it now requisite to enter so far into that Enquiry, as we may know. This is sufficient

* Ephes. I.
19, 20.
II. 1. 5.

† 2 Cor.
III. 5.

|| Phil. II.
13.

* 1 Cor.
XV. 10.

for my present purpose, that the *raising men dead in trespasses and Sins*, and quickening them with a Principle of Spiritual and new Life, are described by St. Paul, * as Miracles, which nothing less than Almighty Power can do. And therefore, when we feel any Desires and Tendencies to lead better Lives, and forsake our old Sins, let us be sure to lay the first Foundation of our Repentance in Humility. Not fondly imagining, that this Sufficiency is of our selves: but, meekly and with all due Thankfulness, acknowledging in the Language of the same St. Paul; that † *we are not able of our selves so much as to think one good thought*, and that it is God alone || *who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure*; that * *by the Grace of God we are what we are*, and that it lies upon Us to take great care, that *his Grace, which is bestowed upon us, be not in vain*. To which purpose,

2. Secondly, St. Peter's Example teaches us, that our Repentance ought to be speedy. He was no sooner made sensible of his fault, but immediately he left the Scene of his Wickedness, broke loose from the Company, that had

had drawn him into it, and betook himself to his Prayers and his Tears. And We in like manner, if we would approve our selves true Penitents, must strike in with the very first Convictions of our own minds. We must not tamper with our Consciences, nor seek out frivolous Excuses for deferring our Reformation; but improve the Motions of Grace, and quit all occasions of Sin; All that Company, All those Pleasures, or whatever else hath been a snare to us heretofore, must be wholly abandoned. Or (if that cannot be) so carefully watched, so cautiously used, that all the Approaches and Passes may be guarded and blocked up, where the Tempter hath used, or is likely to break in upon us. And This is a thing that will admit of no delay, because the continuing to cherish and approve our Sins is the same thing in effect with committing them over again. It argues the very same disposition still to remain. For he that is loath to part with his Vices, wants nothing but Opportunity to repeat them. And God, who judges us according to the Bent of our Wills, and measures the Good or Evil we do, by
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the Degrees of Love or Hatred we bear to Him and Religion, knows very well, that They who put off their Repentance to a further day, are still in *the Gall of Bitterness and the Bond of Iniquity*. Men may flatter themselves, and impose upon Others, with I know not what idle Pretences; but He that is seriously convinced he ought to repent, and does not set about it immediately, is not in good earnest, nor does he sincerely hate his wicked ways, or heartily intend ever to repent at all.

3. *Thirdly*, The Bitterness of St. Peter's Weeping instructs us, how necessary and how Efficacious a branch of Repentance it is, to be deeply and heartily sorry for our Sins. This is necessary, because we have to deal with a God to whom we are not in a condition of bringing any Atonement; and therefore the Only Satisfaction we can make him, is the taking the Shame of our Fault to our selves, and being unfeignedly afflicted for all our unworthy behaviour toward him. For which reason the *broken and contrite heart* is called in a peculiar manner *God's Sacrifice*, and such an Offering
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as *he will not despise.* (Psal. LI. 17.)

And as such Sorrow is Necessary, so is it likewise of great Efficacy in the present case, because our Care to avoid Sin for the future, will naturally be proportionable to our Concern for having committed it heretofore. Hence are the pious Mourners so blessed, Hence the shootings and stinging pains of a wounded Conscience the greatest Mercies to the Sufferer; Because such pains are profitable, by begetting an irreconcilable and settled aversion against the wretched Cause of them, and firmer resolutions to deliver from such smart and misery, by seeking the *peaceable fruits of Righteousness* ever after. And, because such inward Reproaches and Anguish of Heart, if the degree of This Sorrow be equal, will have the same natural Effects with all Other Sorrow; Therefore we are so often called upon for the same Testimonies of it as are usual under Other Afflictions. Hence we

are commanded to * turn to the Lord * Joel II. with *weeping and Mourning*; Hence ^{12.}

David washed his bed, and watered his † Psal. VI. *Couch with Tears,* † and Hence God is ^{6.} said to put *such Tears into his bottle* ||, || Psal. LVI. ^{8.} that

* 2 Cor.
VII. 10.

that is, To treasure them up, and have them in favourable Remembrance ; because as St. Paul says, * *Godly sorrow worketh Repentance.* Mistake not (my Friends,) Sorrow is not Repentance, but works it ; that is, it is Instrumental toward it, and very powerful to produce it. Which leads me to a

Fourth thing, in which if we do not imitate St. Peter, all the rest is of no Significance at all to us ; And That is an Effectual Change of Manners, and stedfast Perseverance in Holiness for the time to come. And This will be the natural Consequence of our Sorrow for Sin, if it be indeed afflicting and sincere. For No Man thinks he can be too careful to avoid that, which creates him disquiet ; No Man needs be warned to keep at a distance from things which he hates and apprehends extream danger, and certain Destruction from. If therefore This be our real Sense of Sin, our Behaviour will be agreeable to it. But, besides the Obligation, which a due Regard to our own Safety lays upon us, we are likewise bound to it in
Gratitude

Gratitude to Almighty God. For, Which way can we express our thanks for the inestimable mercy of being rescued out of the Captivity of Sin and Death, so well as by living to Him who hath thus loved us? It is not enough in such a case, that we refuse to be entangled again in the same Yoke of Bondage. Thus much we owe to our Selves: But to Him who hath *hewed our snares in pieces*, we owe a great deal more. The greater our Debt was, the more we must testify our Affection to the kind Creditor who released it. And This can only be done, by devoting our selves as eagerly to the Service of Religion, as ever we had done formerly to that of our Lusts: By stemming the Torrent of Profaneness and Impiety, and endeavouring with all our might to promote Goodness in the World. Particularly by being eminently conspicuous in those Virtues, which are most directly contrary to the Vices we formerly indulged, and by our active indefatigable Charity to the Souls of our Brethren, giving Testimony how just a value we set upon the
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the deliverance of our Own, in our mighty care to rescue Theirs.

Thus far St. Peter's Example leads us. But, even when we have followed it thus far, we may not suppose, that our Pardon and good Acceptance are due to any Desert of our own Good Works; Or, that our deepest Sorrow can (properly speaking) have in it any thing of Satisfaction. For as * St. Peter's

* Luke

XXII.

32. *Faith did therefore not fail, because Christ prayed that it might not; so our Restoration and the Efficacy of our Repentance is entirely the Effect of the Merits and Intercession of the same kind Saviour. He only could take up this quarrel between offended God and sinful Man; and therefore, when we find God most easy of Access, and are suffered to draw so near, as even to be mystically united to him, and fed by him; let us not forget to beg that the intolerable Burden of our Sins may be removed, not in Presumption of our own Righteousness, but in confidence of his manifold and great Mercies: humbly beseeching him, That for his*
Son

St. Peter's Repentance.

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*Son our Lord Jesus Christ's Sake, he
would forgive us all that is past, and
grant that we may ever hereafter serve
and please Him In newness of Life, To
the honour and glory of his holy Name,
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

S E R-

SERMON VII.

THE CERTAINTY

AND

Nature of Regeneration.

St. John III. 8.

*The Wind bloweth where it listeth,
and thou hearest the Sound
thereof, but canst not tell whence
it cometh, nor whither it goeth;
So is every one that is born of
the Spirit.*

WHEN we read of Nicodemus adventuring to Visit Jesus, and acknowledging the Conviction his Miracles had wrought upon some of the Beholders;

Beholders ; that they concluded from hence his Mission and Authority to be Divine, it is plain somewhat more than mere Curiosity drew him to this Conference. Desires he had, though as yet but imperfect, of better Instruction ; but such as they were, our Saviour did not disdain to gratify them, in entering upon a Discourse concerning the Kingdom of God : That Kingdom, which it was his design to bring men to ; the Kingdom of that God from whom he came a Teacher. Whether *Nicodemus* had enquired into the Qualifications, requisite to prepare Men for, and admit them into this Kingdom, we know not ; or whether Christ of his own accord fell upon This, as a Point the most improving, the most necessary to be first understood, and most pertinent to the purpose of stealing this Visit. Nor was it material for St. *John* to acquaint us. That which is of much greater Consequence is, that he makes a *Man's being born again*, the indispensable Condition of *seeing that Kingdom*. (V. 3.) And This deserves the Greater Attention, because a Master in *Israel* mistook it ; As if God had intended the Impossibility ;

sibility (or at least our Saviour were so absurd to propose it) of going through the Course of a Natural Birth the second time. (V. 4.) From that wild Misconstruction our Lord delivers himself, and explains the Nature of Regeneration. *That Water and the Spirit*, the Washing of Baptism outwardly, and the inward Sanctifications of the Holy Ghost are the Principles by which it is effected. (V. 5.) *That*, Could it be compassed in that gross way *Nicodemus* misapprehended; yet, that would be of no Efficacy, no Advantage at all in this Case. For, since in all Productions the thing born receives the Nature and Resemblance of That, whence its Being was derived; Flesh could only produce Flesh. But the new Creature, which God requires, consists in the Mind; and therefore to bring forth a new Spirit, it is necessary, that the Vital Principle should be a Spirit. (V. 6.) And, however he might find some difficulty in assenting to this, because neither the Cause, nor the manner of its Operation, fall under the notice of the Bodily Senses, yet is not that any just Exception against the Reality of the Fact;

Fact ; A very familiar Instance where-
of he alledges in the Words of my
Text, which are thus introduced by
the *seventh* Verse. *Marvel not that I*
said unto thee, Ye must be born again ;
The Wind bloweth where it listeth, and
thou hearest the Sound thereof, but canst
not tell whence it cometh, and whither
it goeth ; so is every one that is born of
the Spirit.

The Words plainly consist of two
parts, *A Similitude*, and *The Applica-*
tion ; and my Discourse upon them
shall accordingly distribute it self into
these Two Heads.

First, *From the Similitude I shall*
draw some general Conclusions, which
may direct us in our Contemplation of Di-
vine Truths, and especially That of Re-
generation, which is the Subject Matter
of our Lord's Argument with Nicode-
mus.

Secondly, *From the Application I*
shall consider how far the properties of
the Wind mentioned here, will give us
any just ground to judge of the Holy
Spirit's workings upon the Souls of
Men.

I. *I begin with some General Conclusions drawn from the Similitude it self; such as may direct us in our Contemplation of Divine Truths; and more especially in That of Regeneration, which is the subject Matter of our Lord's Argument with Nicodemus. And these Conclusions are as follow.*

i. *First, A man may have sufficient Reason to assure himself that a Thing really is, without being able to give an account how it came to be. For the Cause of a Thing is indeed one, and a very satisfactory way, of coming to the distinct Knowledge of its Nature. But this is but One way of Many, and Some things, which we cannot come at this way, may be so certain to us, that it would be the Extremity of an Obstinate Singularity to deny them. For as things have Causes, so have they likewise Effects, and Properties, and other Characters, by which they may be distinguished. And it is enough in all Conscience, if any of these give Evidence of their existing. For we are every whit as sure, that what hath no Being of its own cannot have Properties and Effects, as we are, that it could never have been without a Cause.*
And

And therefore, when we are able to assign any such Properties or Effects, that is a Demonstration of the Reality of the Thing. For instance, Very Few, if Any, of the most Learned, have been able to give a satisfactory Account of the Original of Winds, but the Hypothesis of one Philosopher, is disliked and exploded by another. Now though these Curious Searchers into Nature cannot agree *whence they come and whither they go*; yet herein they all agree, that *come and go* they do. This they know without any search; And the unlettered part of the World, who have neither Capacity, nor Leisure, for nice Enquiries, believe it as firmly, and know it as assuredly, as They. In like manner, if there be certain Marks, by which a Man *born of the Spirit* is evidently discerned, and distinguished from another that is not so born; We may from those Marks conclude, that such a Man is Regenerate, though we could not positively determine from whence this Principle of new Life took its rise: Or if we knew, as know we may, that it could be owing to no other Cause but the

Operations of the Holy Ghost ; we may then, where such Marks appear, be confident that the sanctifying Operations of the Holy Ghost have passed upon that Person, though neither We who were Standers-by, nor perhaps the Man himself, was conscious of the Manner, in which they were begun, and carried on in his mind.

2. Secondly, *A thing may be sufficiently perceivable One way, which is not at all so in another.* For in all Objects of Knowledge, there is something of Agreement and Proportion betwixt that Object and the Organ or Faculty that is contrived to apprehend it ; and upon this mutual Suitableness depends the Perception. Thus it is with our Bodily Senses ; Each of them have parts fitted for receiving such Impressions as are proper to their purpose ; and the Qualities of Bodies are not applied to All these parts indifferently ; but severally to Each ; as Each is by Nature accommodated for the entertaining, and making a Report of them to the Soul. Thus we do not hear Colours, nor see Perfumes, nor smell Sounds ; and yet we are as fully satisfied, that there are
 Sounds,

Sounds, though we hear them only, as if we saw and smelt them too. To the same purpose it is, that our Saviour argues in the Text. A Man sees not either any Shape, or any Motion, of the Wind it self; All that he knows of this kind, is only the motion of other Bodies agitated by it; And yet he makes no difficulty to allow, that *it blows, when he hears the sound of it*; because the Wind is not an Object proportioned to the Eye, but the noise of it is to the Ear; and therefore he receives the Testimony of that Sense, which has a Competent Knowledge, without troubling himself, that this is not confirmed by the other Senses, which are incapable of knowing any thing, in the matter. This is the force of the Allusion, and that which by Parity of Reason arises from it is this. That the Case is the same between the Intellectual Faculties and the Sensitive in general, with that betwixt One Sense and Another. And, if we acknowledge a thing's Reality when we hear the Sound, but see no Shape of it; because it is in Nature fitted to affect our Hearing, but not our Sight; There is the same Reason, why we

should assent, to what our Understanding can apprehend, though our Senses do not ; if it be of that kind, which may give evidence to the mind, and make it self understood ; though it cannot make it self seen, or heard, or felt by us. Now a Spirit cannot work upon the outward Organs, which can never be moved by any other Impressions than those of Body and Matter ; But if by help of Meditation, by laying and comparing things together, and considering the Consequences that naturally result from them, we find that such a thing there is, and such Footsteps there are of its Working, we then may and ought to rest satisfied, both of the Existence, and the Operation of that Spirit. Because we have the Evidence proper for the Condition of the thing ; such as it is capable of ; And the Intellectual Faculties of the Mind, were intended by God for Helps and Instruments of attaining Knowledge, no less than the Sensitive Organs of the Body. Different Objects require different Perceptions ; and * *St. Paul* hath observed it, as an Ornament and Excellence, rather than any Imperfection of Humane Nature,

Nature, that the several Parts have their several Offices allotted to them.

3. *Thirdly*, It is implied by this Similitude, that *some things are capable of being known by the Effects, which we cannot come to the Knowledge of any other way.* No man need go far for Proof of This. *Intus habes quod poscis.* We all are sure, that we carry somewhat about us which we call a Soul. Somewhat that thinks, and deliberates, and chuses, that imagines, and judges, and remembers; that fears, and hopes, and loves, and hates, and desires, and refuses, and grieves, and rejoices, according to the different Apprehensions we receive, of the Objects about which we are conversant. This we know from our own Feeling and Experience: And yet the Wisest of us all do not know the time when, or the manner how, this Soul was created, and united to our Bodies, nor a Thousand Difficulties more, which might be started; but yet stagger not any reasonable Man's assent; because he is satisfied, that these Effects must have a Cause adequate to them. So likewise Our Saviour takes for granted, that the noise and Sound
was

was Proof sufficient that the Wind blows; the shakings and rattlings of Boughs, the raising Storms at Sea, the tearing up Trees, and rocking of Houses, All convince us, that the Air is in a Violent Agitation; and yet we are not privy to the first beginnings of it. We cannot tell what raised this mighty Ferment, nor where it set out, nor how far it intends, nor what becomes of it when it ceases. The Mariners are sure they are carried up to the Heaven, and down again to the deep; they see the Waves boil and foam like a Pot, and feel their Vessel stagger like a drunken Man; and they doubt not to conclude the Wind is the doer of it, without ever disputing, how it was able to disturb the face of the Deep, or blow up the Waters into such Rage and Tumult. And it is here urged to *Nicodemus*, as a thing equally agreeable to Reason, that men should submit to the Belief of a Second Birth, if the Effects of that Birth appear, though the Cause and Progress of it do not. For instance, St. John says, *He * that doth Righteousness is born of God, in this the Children of God are manifest, and the Children*

* 1 John
III. 9, 10.

Children of the Devil. St. Paul acquaints us, That * *the New Creature is* ^{*Gal. V. 6.}
Faith which worketh by Love ; † that ^{VI. 15.}
the Fruits of the Spirit are Love, Joy, ^{† Gal. V. 22.}
Peace, Long-suffering, Gentleness, Good-
ness, Faith, Meekness, and Temperance :
 We are likewise told, || *That it is God,* || ^{Phil. II.}
who worketh in us both to will and to do ^{13.}
of his good pleasure. Now from hence
 it follows most undeniably, that let
 Moral Duties be never so much dispa-
 raged, as mean and low, and Legal ;
 Yet wheresoever we see any Man li-
 ving Righteously ; where we find such
 a mixture of Faith and Charity, and
 all that bright Constellation of Virtues
 mentioned just now ; we may and
 ought to pronounce that Man *born of*
the Spirit. For though the Tree be
 not visible to us, yet the Fruits are ;
 and since those Practices are the Genu-
 ine Product of the Influences of the
 Spirit, and cannot be produced from
 any other Principle ; to attribute them
 to Nature, or to any thing besides, is
 in effect to say, *that Grapes may be ga-*
thered of Thorns ; and Figs of Thistles.
 For it is *this good Tree alone that can*
bring forth those good Fruits. And if
 by the Fruits it were not sufficiently

to

to be known, our Saviour would never have confirmed, nor the Common Sense of Mankind have agreed, in making Good and Evil Actions, an infallible Character, whereby to distinguish the Spirits and Principles from whence they flow.

And a necessary Consequence of this Particular is, That if such Good Practices, where they are conspicuous, declare that they are wrought by the Spirit, and that God hath renewed that Man, and did, and does still, act and dwell in him: Then it is no less certain, that where the Contrary Vices and Dispositions are predominant, those men are not Regenerate, nor does the Spirit of God work in them. *Let no man deceive you* (says the Apostle) * *whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his Brother.* Men may delude themselves and their ignorant Followers, with boasting pretences; they may have the Impiety even to sanctify their blackest Crimes, by fathering them upon Divine Impulse and Inspiration: But, while we see them turbulent and factious, proud and disobedient, censorious and bitter, unjust and uncharitable, can we think that

* 1 John
III. 10.

that God is the Author of, or dwells with these froward Dispositions? It were a Contradiction to all Religion to suppose so; and, however they may be exalted by their own vain Imaginations, yet alas! *they know not themselves, nor what Spirit they are of.*

4. There is yet a *Fourth* Consideration easy to be gathered from the Similitude before us, which is, That *when once we know all, that is needful for our purpose, we ought to make the best Improvement of that; and not raise Mists, and perplex our Minds, and neglect our Duty, by indulging unprofitable Enquiries after what we cannot, or need not, know.* The End of all Knowledge, whether Natural or Revealed, is not Curiosity but Use; And while we want no degree that may be serviceable, it is not only Folly, but Impiety, to dwell upon Niceties, and mere Speculations. Let us put the Case, that a Pilot, or a Husbandman, were admitted into the dark Caverns of the Earth, and saw Vapours there engender into Winds; What Benefit would Humane Life receive from any Intelligence he could bring from thence? Could such a one
swell

swell his Sails, or make more way with a Convenient Gale? Could he bid the Tempests be still, or smoothe the face of the Deep, for being let into this Secret? Could the Farmer secure his Fruits from a Blast, any more than he can now? The same Methods would still obtain in each Profession, and the same degrees of Efficacy they would have. Why should it not be so in Religion too? The Causes when seen would be the same they are now; Our Knowledge could not add new Force and Vigour, but they must act neither more nor less than they do unseen. Could we distinctly feel and see, and make Reflections upon our Second Birth, this would profit us no more, the want of it can prejudice us no more, than it does in the Natural. The Infant is perfectly in the dark, while he is in the Womb; He knows not what is doing, when the Embryo is formed, and nourished there; He comes to Maturity and struggles for Freedom, and forces his Passage into the World, without being sensible why, or how, this is done. When he arrives at the use of Reason, he hath not the least Remembrance of this

this kind ; yet Nature keeps her Course, and performs her Charge faithfully and with great Exactness, and All he can collect is, that he is born a Man ; And This he is infallibly sure of, because he lives, and moves, and acts as a Man. In like manner the Children of God know they are born of Him, because they govern themselves by a Spiritual and Divine Principle. And this they do, not one whit the less, notwithstanding they cannot enter into the Causes and Methods of this Birth. The Efficient Cause they know was the Spirit, and could be none else ; and the Dignity of His Person is the Consideration, which must deterr them from resisting his Motions, and doing despight to his Grace, and quenching that Life he hath given them. They can show all the Signs of such a Birth ; the meek and Dove-like Disposition ; the pious and Heavenly Conversation, which none, but They who are of God, can have. And the Advantages at last will be the same too. For, as the Husbandman gathers in that Corn, which, though of his own sowing, comes up he knows not how ; so they *who sow*
to

Galat. VI.
8.

to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life Everlasting, though they understand not all the mysterious ways, by which they were enabled to grow in Grace and put forth the precious fruits of righteousness.

Well were it if these few Considerations were duly weighed, and discreetly observed : They would restrain that bold and busy temper, that insolent licentious arguing, which under colour of Reason and free Thinking, brings holy Mysteries into Contempt, and shipwracks numbers of unwary Souls. Those divine Truths above our Comprehension would then be received with Meekness, or at least disputed with Modesty ; For, though we cannot fathom this Abyss, yet it comes to us confirmed with proper Testimonies, and such as, *How can these things be ?* does by no means confute or weaken. This *Nicodemus* urged to Christ, against a Spiritual and Second Birth, and yet our Lord did not allow the Objection. Nay, even this Birth it self hath suffered too, and been ill represented, by daring Attempts of Men, who have undertaken to shew the manner of it, and speak very positively, where God was silent. In
Opposition

Opposition to whose dangerous Errors, I shall now come to my

II. *Second Head*, and from the *Application* will consider, *how far the Properties of the Wind mentioned in this Similitude*, will give us any just ground to judge of the *Holy Spirit's workings upon the minds of men.*

The Application is contained in the last Clause of the Verse, *So is every one that is born of the Spirit.* That is; The work of Regeneration carries great Resemblance to what is observed of the Wind; for as There we gather its Blowing, from the Sound and other Effects; though we do not see the Blast, nor its Rise and Passage, nor are acquainted with the Cause that sets it on: So may a Child of God know he is such, by the Effects and Characters of that Relation; though he do not see the Spirit that renews him, though the Operations by which he is renewed be such, as fall not under the Observation of his outward Senses, nor is perhaps his own mind conscious to many things, by which that Change is wrought in him.

I. And first, From that Expression, *The Wind bloweth where it listeth*, we

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may

*Rom. XI,
IV, IX,
Chapters.

may I think, fairly infer the Freedom of God's Grace. That he gives it liberally, and of his own accord, and that it is what no Merit of ours can oblige him to give. In this Argument *St. Paul* hath laboured much, * shewing that the very notion of Grace and the nature of it is contrary to that of Works and of Debt. That *Abraham*, the Father and the Pattern of the Faithful, received the Call and Promise of God, while he was yet among Idolaters, and could have no Works to boast of ; That, when Jews and Gentiles were both concluded under Sin, God chose the Gentiles, as he did *Jacob* before *Esan*, freely while yet in the Womb ; Not that the One of these had any wrong done him, or was used worse than he deserved ; but the Other found great Favour, and was used better than he deserved ; And so the Chosen ought to be thankful and rejoyce, but the Rejected could not complain, nor had he any thing to accuse God of. Thus it is also in the Work of Regeneration. God gives us his preventing Graces freely ; He imparts the Light of his Gospel, and it is a marvellous Blessing to be born and educated

educated in those happy Regions, which are enlightned with the pure Lustre of it. When we believe this Gospel, it's his Grace that disposes our minds to do so ; When that Faith exerts it self in Works of Obedience, This also is owing to the Assistances of his Grace. When we improve to higher excellencies, and approach nearer to the Perfections of a Spiritual and Divine Life, This is again from the more abundant Communications of the same Grace. 'Tis true indeed, Christ hath engaged to give an increase of *Talents to Them* who make a good Use of the * Talents they already have ; He hath assured us, that our † *Heavenly Father will not fail to grant the holy Spirit to them that ask him* : But still it is by the Aid and Influence of that very Spirit, that we ask the Talents we have not, and that we improve those we have. So that This does but enhance God's Mercy and Bounty so much the more, which first enables us to act, and then rewards us for acting ; For that is in effect to crown and compleat His Own Work, rather than Our Desert ; since what we do acquires a Title to his Promise, and yet it is

* Matth.
XXV. 29.
* Luke XI.
13.

what we could not do, if He did not impart to us the Power of doing it.

There is indeed another Sense of this Expression fixed upon by an * Interpreter of Note, which is, that the Spirit of God blows upon mens minds, in so gentle a manner, as not to take away the listings of them, but leaves the Will the same Exercise of its Freedom, though in Conjunction with, and under the Conduct of, Grace. But This, if I mistake not, though it be deducible from the Text, seems rather to be implied in that other Passage, *Thou canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth.* By which I conceive we are led to a

2. *Second* Reflection concerning the manner of the Spirit's working upon our minds, which is, That, As we can give no account of the Rise, the increase, the quieting of the Wind, where it began, where it will stop, or how long it will last; So the Operations of the Spirit are many times very remote from our Understanding. He may move us without our having any distinct Perception of the thing; nor can we always say, Then the impulse began, thus long it continued, and
now

now it ceases to move me. And this cannot seem very strange to any, that shall consider, by what steps he hath come off from a wicked Life, or proceeded in a Good one. For in all This he will find nothing of Violence or External Compulsion, but such Motives all along as were entirely agreeable to his Faculties, and the Methods by which he proceeds in other Cases. For did not this Change begin with a Conviction of Sin, and the Evil of it, and consequent hereunto a Hatred and Detestation ground upon such Argument, as these; that it is contrary to Reason, displeasing to God, destructive to Soul and Body, in rendring Both obnoxious to the Divine Wrath and Vengeance, and that Eternity of Misery, which the present fleeting Pleasures of Wickedness are a very poor and silly Exchange for? Again, Will not his Advance in Vertue be found to owe it self, to the Contemplation of the Beauty, the Reasonableness, the Advantages of Holiness, the Alluring Rewards it proposes, the Happiness it secures in this Life and the next? How then did These Arguments prevail at last? Was it not by

frequent Meditation, by insinuating themselves into the Mind by degrees, by the common Methods of Reading, or Hearing, and weighing God's word; by vanquishing the prejudices of our corrupt Hearts, by discussing and displaying the Evidence of Truth, by faithful and honest Application; by exciting good desires, strengthening those Desires with Holy Resolutions, and making good these Resolutions by diligent Endeavours and stedfast Perseverance? But still the Finger of God is in all This. It is He, that brings these Considerations into our hearts at first. He, that fastens them upon us when they are there; He, that adds new Life and Vigour to our Desires and Intentions, and gives Efficacy and Success to our, otherwise Weak and imperfect, Attempts. He convinces our Judgments, kindles good Inclinations, persuades, allures, threatens, deters; terrifies, reproaches; comforts, commends; and performs all other Offices necessary to Piety; But these he performs *in* us, and *with* us, and *by* us. From Him, as we acknowledge in our daily Prayers, all *holy desires*, all *good counsels*, and all *just works* proceed;

ceed ; But they proceed from Him in such a manner, as still to be *our* desires, *our* counsels, and *our* works. We know we cannot come to *Christ* except the *Father* draw us, and therefore we are sure, that as many as come are drawn : But then they are drawn by the Cords of a Man ; invited and wrought upon by the dictates of Reason, by the Instructions and Exhortations of God's Word, by the Admonitions and Checks of their own Consciences ; In a manner suitable to their Rational Nature and Faculties, in a way that requires their own Cooperation and Consent ; and the more Men work the more God will work with them. In a word, the Spirit acts in the Nature of an Assistant against our Infirmities, but not as an Undertaker of the Work, or a Bearer of the whole Burden ; And all he does is by Infusions so gentle, so sweet, so secret, so tender, as to fall in with our own thoughts. And if Scripture had not declared all the Good we do to be from God, we could not many times distinguish between the Motions of His Spirit, and those of Our own. That thus it is, both Reason, and Ex-

* John
XVII. 17.
Ephes. V.
26.
|| Rom. XV.
16.

† I Pet. I.
3.
* I Cor.
IV. 15.

† Ezek.
XVIII. 31.

|| Ezek.
XXXVI.
26.

* I Cor.
XV. 10.

perience, and (which is most of all) Revelation abundantly inform us. Hence men are said to be * *sanctified by the Word, of God, and by the Washing of Water*, and to be || *sanctified by the Holy Ghost*. Why? Because the Spirit of God is the Author and Finisher, and the Word and Sacraments are the Means and Instruments, of our Sanctification. † God is said to *beget men to a Spiritual Life*; and the * Ministers of the Gospel are said to *beget* them also: And very properly both; for We apply Arguments, and God renders them effectual; Our People attend to those Arguments, and God gives them the power of Perswasion, and sets them home, and fixes them upon their minds, and thus conveys to them a Principle of Spiritual Life, by the Mediation of Our Ministry. God promises to give Sinners † a *new heart*, and he commands Sinners to make themselves a || *new heart*. And what can any reasonable Reader gather from this, but that the Renewing of our Souls is wrought by the Concurrence of Almighty God with our own Endeavours? St. Paul declares, himself * *laboured more abundantly than all the Apostles*;

Apostles ; and yet declares in the same Breath, that *it was not He, but the Grace of God, which was with him.* The plain and natural Consequence whereof is, that the Labour was His, but the Power, and the Glory, and the Success of it, God's. The same Apostle exhorts the *Philippians*, * *to* * Phil. II. 12, 13. *work out their own Salvation, because it is God, that worketh in them both to will, and to do, of his good Pleasure.* And wherein lies the force and fitness of that Motive, except in This? that Something We must do, or God will do Nothing ; but, that All We can do will signify Nothing, except God came in to our Assistance, and do Something too.

The Point before us may be farther confirmed by the various Constructions of the word *Spirit* in the New Testament. Which is sometimes opposed to the *Flesh*, sometimes to the *Letter* and the *Law* ; Sometimes it signifies the outward Ministration of the Gospel ; Sometimes the inward Persuasions of Grace in our Hearts. And the best Inference I know of from this Ambiguity of Expression, is, that leading a Life of Reason, and Purity,
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in Opposition to our Brutish and Carnal Lusts ; living a Life of Faith in Opposition to the Law of Ceremonies and Confidence in our own Works ; governing our selves by the written Word of God, and observing the directions and good motions of the Spirit of God within us, mean and come all to the same thing at last ; that He who does the One, does the Other also ; and *Walking in the Spirit*, and *living after the Spirit*, include them all, in which soever of these Senses you interpret it. Now these are Matters, in which, when we are excited to them, nothing farther is discernible by Us, than the Resolutions and the Probity of our own minds ; but, from comparing these Texts, it manifestly appears, that God is all the while behind the Curtain, and works strongly, though he work unseen.

And, Methinks, it ought by no means to seem an incredible thing, that He, who made our Minds, and stamped his own Image upon them, should be so intimate with these Minds of Ours, as to communicate whatever Influences he sees fit, without being necessitated to make use of our Bodily Organs,

Organs, or any such gross Means, as must fall under the notice of our Senses. We know, our own Soul moves us, and yet we do not feel it by any Impulse, that makes a sensible Impression upon this outward Structure : Nor can we say, how this Motion is conveyed from an Immaterial to the finest Corporeal Substance : How That commands so powerfully, and every part of This obeys so readily. Surely then He, who created Soul and Body both, and found a way to move Matter, by that which is not Matter, cannot want Methods of making His Spirit correspond with Ours (the Spirit creating with that created by it) no nor of carrying on this Correspondence in so easy and familiar a manner, that We our selves, when blown upon from above, shall not be able to discern distinctly, *whence this Wind cometh, and whither it goeth*. I will just mention some Inferences which seem undeniably to follow from the former Arguments, and so conclude.

I. And *First*, This shews the Error of those men, who require it, as a mark of Grace to assign the Instant of ones own Conversion. For in so doing

ing they suppose several things which contradict what hath been delivered, and cannot, as I presume, stand with our Saviour's meaning in the Text. They must suppose, That the work of Conversion was wrought in an Instant; That the manner of effecting it was by strong and sensible Impressions, such as the Party must needs be conscious of; That it was a Violent as well as a sudden Change; And thus they raise this Wind up into a Hurricane, that shall carry men forcibly from a State of Sin, to a State of Grace: They make it a motion in which men are purely passive; for all this is implied, in the Blowing of such a Wind, as men will not content themselves with the Sound of, to be satisfied of its Truth, but require an account *whence it cometh, and whither it goeth?* And lastly, they stretch this Metaphor of a Second Birth too far; and make that signify the Manner of the Operation, which is only intended to import the Greatness of the Change.

Secondly, What went before deserves to be well considered, because if it were so, it would make men very careful not to resist any of the good Motions,

tions, nor go against the Sense and Chidings, of their own Breasts. *Quenching*, and *Grieving*, and *Resisting*, and *Doing Despight to the Spirit of God*, are what most People seem to have a great Dread and Abhorrence of ; but the misfortune is, that they often commit these Crimes, without being aware that they do so. Should God in a Clap of Thunder, bid the Sinner hold his hand, it is probable the sturdiest of them all would not dare to proceed in a wicked Act ; Should he strike every man to the Ground with such a dazzling Light as he did *St. Paul*, They would (it is to be hoped) presently ask with Him, *Lord what wilt thou have me to do?* But as it is, They see no visible Tokens of the Divinity, and therefore they regard not his Calls. Now God by the Manifestation of himself to *Elijah*, shewed that *He was in the Still small voice*, though not in the strong *Wind nor the Earthquake*, nor *the Fire*. And if his Spirit mingle it self with our Thoughts, If (as hath been said) it act upon us by the outward Ministry of the Word, by the inward Dictates and Reason-

Reasonings of our minds; If the Effects only of his working be visible, but the Manner of it imperceptible; Then every Admonition from the Pulpit, Every wholesome Law, Every Advice from a Friend or a Parent, Every good Book, Every pious Example, Every Motion and Intention to do well, Every Conviction or Check of our own Conscience, is a *Blowing of this Wind*, a Call, or Impulse from above; And as often as any Man refuses to comply with these things, so often he resists God, and quenches his Spirit within himself.

Thirdly, This shews us, what Course men should take, in order to get, or to grow in Grace; For since God works by and with his Ordinances; our Business must be to use the Word and Sacraments, and other means of Grace diligently; to seek him there, to put to the Shoulder, and do Our Part resolutely and manfully, and then not doubt his Assistance. For upon these Terms, we may depend upon it, that He will forward and strengthen our good Intentions; and (since he creates all our Works in us,) that

that he will not fail to finish what he himself hath begun, but will perform, and continue it until the Day of Christ Jesus; and in that day for his Sake and Merits, will most assuredly crown Us and our Labours with Everlasting Glory.

Now to God the Father, &c.

S E R-

SERMON VIII.

THE

Conditions and Privileges

OF THE

SECOND BIRTH.

St. John I. 12, 13.

*As many as received him, to them
gave he power to become the
Sons of God, even to them that
believe on his Name :*

*Which were born, not of blood, nor
of the will of the Flesh, nor of
the will of Man, but of God.*

THE Evangelist, after having in
the beginning of the Chapter,
with great Exactness, declar-
ed the Eternal Divinity of the Word
of

of God, and, that This was the very Person testified of by the Baptist, (by which we are assured, that this Word, is no other than Jesus Christ the Son of God incarnate;) and having likewise spoken of his coming into the World, he mentions here with what different success he did it. Some, that were more peculiarly obliged, and most nearly related to him, from whom an honourable Reception might most reasonably be expected, gave him no Respect, no Entertainment at all. And this was the case of the perverse *Jews*, whom God had laid his hand upon, and singled out from the rest of Mankind; for which reason they are called in the 11th Verse, *τὰ ἴδια*, his proper Possession. Christ's being refused there was an indignity, like that of a Man's being driven, or shut out of his Demesnes or Dwelling-house. *He came to his own, and his own received him not.* The Loss however was not His but Theirs; in denying Him they denied their own Happiness; which was so great, so evident, that St. *John* thought no other expression of their Misery and Punishment was needful,

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than

than only to describe the Privileges of those who behaved themselves more kindly and dutifully to him. And this is done in the Text it self, *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the Sons of God, even to them that believe on his Name; Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.* For the right understanding and due Improvement whereof, it will be expedient to consider the following Particulars.

First, The Persons who alone are capable of Benefit by Christ's coming into the World, *They who receive him, and believe on his Name.*

Secondly, The Nature of that Benefit which they obtain by so doing, *To them he gives power to become the Sons of God.*

Thirdly, The manner how this Sonship is conferred, *They are born not of blood, nor of the will of the Flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

Fourthly, The Extent of this Privilege, he gives it to *as many as receive, and believe on him.*

I. The *First* thing, we are concerned to know upon this occasion, is, Who those Persons are to whom the Advantages of Christianity belong, or What that Condition is which must qualify men for the Benefits of Christ's coming into the World; This the Text hath expressed in those words, who *receive him*, and *believe on his Name*. Now these are Terms explanatory of one another; And, as the *Jews* are therefore said not to have *received him*, because they *believed him not*, but rejected his Authority and Doctrine: So Faith in what he hath revealed, and Obedience to what he hath commanded, are the Marks and Means of our receiving him. And These consist, not in a mere giving him the hearing, and forbearing all publick and malicious Opposition to his word; but in acknowledging the Truth and the Evidence of it; depending upon his Promises, expecting Salvation from that Name and no other, and diligently endeavouring to perform all that is required on our part; All, that, according to the Covenant of the Gospel, can any way contribute to the rendring what he

hath done and suffered effectual in our own particular Case.

That This must needs be the meaning of the Phrase is manifest to any man who will consider it closely. For *to receive Christ* is to receive him as he is, to submit to him in all those Capacities, which God hath placed him over us in. To receive him as our *Prophet* implies a firm Adherence to the whole of that Message, which he hath brought us from Heaven, to own his Divine Commission, and be instructed by him. To receive him as our *Priest*, is to rely upon his most meritorious Sacrifice, to confess the Sufficiency of his Atonement, and to detest and forsake those Sins, for which he hath made so perfect, but withal so severe and painful, an Expiation. To receive him as our *King*, is to own his Legislative Power, to pay him strict Fidelity and Allegiance, to bring all our Passions and Interests under Subjection to his Will, and suffer no rebellious Appetites to raise wicked Seditions, or tempt us to Unfaithfulness and Disloyalty against him.

The same is likewise necessarily consequent upon *Believing*; For, since the Object of all Faith is Credible Testimony, and that of Religious Faith is Divine Revelation, He, who acts, or entertains Persuasions contrary to, or derogating from, what God hath declared in Christ, cannot properly be called a Believer on his Name. If therefore God hath made something else necessary, besides a bare Assent of the mind to the Truth of his Doctrines; All That must needs come within the compass, and be included under the notion, of Faith. If the Evangelist tell us in one place, as he does here particularly, that by *believing* men acquire the Privilege of becoming *Sons of God*, and *are born of God*; and yet our Saviour says positively in another (as in the Third of this Gospel at the fifth Verse, we find he does) that *Except a man be born again of Water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God*, it is very plain, that this Belief must be such as is accompanied with, and evidenced by a solemn entring into Covenant with God by Baptism. And He who rests upon a naked Belief, and will not be

baptized when he may, expects in vain, that God will reckon him among his Children, or admit him to any part of his Inheritance ; after having so peremptorily declared, that such a one is none of his, nor in any Condition of entring into his Kingdom. And so in general, If, to acknowledging the truth of the Scriptures, and confessing the Sufferings, the Nature, the Exaltation of Christ ; In a word, If to the most Orthodox Opinions that ever were or can be, we are commanded by the Word of God to add the reverent Observation of Divine Ordinances, devout Prayer, frequent receivings of the Sacrament, and all manner of Vertue and Innocency of Life ; He who neglects These, and puts Confidence in his Understanding or Owing the Principles of Religion, builds upon a sandy and deceitful bottom ; His hope is that of Hypocrites, and will at last lose both it self and Him that cherishes it.

And the Reason of these things is very obvious. For the Redemption of the World by Christ is an arbitrary Act in God, an Act of Free Mercy :

Mercy : As such, it is what no Collections of Natural Light, or Moral Justice can give us any Apprehension at all of. Consequently we can enter no farther into the grounds, and manner of it, than He who did it of his own accord thinks fit to let us into. Consequently again, we are bound to take the Manifestations of it entire, Not to parcel them out, as we see convenient, and so make One Clause of this Indenture repugnant to and destructive of Another. No reasonings of our own are of any weight in this Case, any further than they are justified by Revelation, by the natural Sense of some Text of Scripture, and by the general design of the Christian Dispensation. Now the very same Spirit which says, * *We are saved by Grace through Faith*, hath informed us by the Ministry of the self-same Pen, that † *in Christ Jesus neither Circum-* † Galat. V.
cision availeth any thing, nor Uncircum-
cision, but faith which worketh by Love.
He hath commanded us to || *follow* || Heb. XII,
peace with all men, and holiness, as 14.
things, without which no man shall see
the Lord. He hath drawn a black Catalogue of the Works of the Flesh,

and most solemnly assured us, that
 * Galat. V. *they who are guilty of* * *Adultery, For-*
 19, 20, 21. *nication, Uncleanness, Lasciviousness,*
Idolatry, Witchcraft, Hatred, Variance,
Emulations, Wrath, Strife, Seditions,
Heresies, Envyings, Murders, Drunk-
ennes, Revellings, and such like, shall
not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Is it not now as clear as the Sun,
 that the Man who trusts to any Faith,
 except such a Faith, as *worketh by Love*,
 leans upon a broken Reed? Hath any
 man reason to think his *Confessing*
 Christ will save him, who takes no
 care of either *Peace* or *Holiness*, and
 allows himself in those Abominations
 just now mentioned? Can he be call-
 ed a Believer, who dishonours his
 Profession by a scandalous Life? or
 esteemed a Son of God, who cannot
 see his face, nor inherit his Kingdom?
 It were most absurd to think, most
 blasphemous to say so. The receiving
 Christ is much another thing than
 these men make it. I have already said,
 It is not One simple Act of the Will,
 or the Understanding; but a large and
 a permanent thing, an embracing his
 Doctrines in their just extent, and
 submitting to all the Consequences of
 them

them in our Conversations. 'Tis to preserve a Harmony and punctual Agreement between the several parts of them; that Faith and Virtue, Promises and Precepts, may go hand in hand, and not be set in array to fight against and destroy each other. And thus it must needs be. For He that is otherwise perswaded, acts contrary to this Rule, builds without a Foundation, he forms a New Gospel of his own, and does not *Believe* but *Presume*. In short, God cannot away with these partial Proceedings, these consultings with Flesh and Blood; He will not have his own Institution, the noblest and most compleat that ever was, to be mangled and defaced; And those very *Jews*, who shut Christ out, and would not receive him at all, are not more wicked and inexcusable, than the pretended Christians, who receive him by halves, and, under the Cover of this Profession, affront, and deform, and dishonour him and his Gospel. Far be it from us to imagine, that God will so far prostitute his mercies, as to admit such wretches to the incomparable Advantage mentioned in my Text; They
may

may usurp a Title that is not theirs, but the Obedient and Virtuous *Believers*, the Pious and the Respectful *Receivers* of Christ, These alone are the Persons who *receive* him as Christ, and to them only he *gives power to become the Sons of God*. Which is the Benefit mentioned in the Words, and the Second Head of my Discourse upon them.

II. Those who have Criticized nicely upon this Passage, make great Remarks upon the Evangelist's cautious manner of expressing himself in it. They tell us, It would have been less proper to have said, that Christ made us become the Sons of God, because this would have seemed an Act of Omnipotence and Necessity, such as might have been interpreted in prejudice to the Freedom of our Will, and that part which we our selves contribute to our own Regeneration. Nor had it been equally prudent to say, that he gave us power to make our selves the Sons of God, because this had exalted our Faculties as much too high, and deprest the Bounty of God, and the Honour he hath done us, as if any Performances of Ours could deserve

deserve or procure this Sonship. But by saying, he gave us *power to become the Sons of God*, both these Inconveniences, they think, are saved. The Mercy is still represented in it's due proportion, in that this Honourable Relation is a Grace, and our Advances toward it not a Meritorious Cause, but a Qualification only. And the Liberty of our Actions is still implied, in that he gave us only a power of obtaining, what yet we might not obtain, if we refused, or neglected to exert that power.

Without being so Curious, we may content our selves with that Sense of the word, which our Marginal Reading suggests, and by *power* understand the *Privilege* of becoming the Sons of God, and even thus it affords us these two Considerations. *The Excellence and Greatness of the Benefit*, and Then the *Free Bestowing it upon us*.

I. *The Excellence and Greatness of the Benefit*, is abundantly declared in the very Title it self, insomuch that St. *John* thought he had reason to cry out with some Astonishment, when he reflected upon the Excellence
of

* I John
III. 1.

of the Benefit, and the unparallel'd Greatness of the Condescension. * *Behold* (says he) *what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the Sons of God!* And reason good he had most certainly. For, What could express, What can confer greater Happiness? By This we are allowed to promise our selves all that Protection and Tender Care, all that Compassion and kind Concern, all that Indulgence and favourable Allowance for our failings, all that ready Relief in our necessities, all that ample Provision for our prosperity and well being, which Nature inspires affectionate Fathers with, and gives dutiful Children a right to expect. How much this is I pretend not to describe, for Words cannot do it. I refer my self to Parents, for Parents only know, and what they know in this respect, is much easier felt than express'd. But give me leave to say, that, when the best good-natured man hath summoned all the softest Resentments together, that either the Bowels of a Father, or the most winning Endearments of a Child, can engage him to. This and much more

more is derived down upon every Christian, by being the *Son of God. Of God* ; whose Love is infinite and incomprehensible, grounded upon better and more substantial Motives ; Who, as he is not moved by the same springs of Passion with mortal Men, so he is not subject to their Inconstancies, and Picques, and unaccountable Disgusts. His Affection is steady and permanent ; He always loves when we deserve it, and always pities, and is easy to be reconciled, when we do not. *Of God*, whose Power is as immense as his Love ; So that This does not spend it self in sad Complaints, and melancholy Reflections, and unprofitable Wishes, as that of Earthly Parents often does, who see with aking and with bleeding hearts their Children's wants, and even die under those Miseries they cannot help : But This Father understands all our occasions, can supply all our necessities, can redress all our wrongs, remove all our misfortunes, and is not more willing, than he is able to assist us. *Of God* I say, whose Provision is not like what we are so immoderately solicitous to procure for our Children

Children here upon Earth ; The Prey of usurping Greatness, or treacherous Falshood, or crafty Forgery ; the Booty of Invasion, and Violence, and Theft ; the Sport of Fire, and Water, and Winds, and every Element ; Nay even the Food of Rust, and Moths, Or, if spared by all these, yet at the best such as must wast, and perish in the using ; But an Inheritance, large and Eternal as the Bounteous Giver, above the reach of Casualties, and outlasting even Time it self. *Of God* lastly, the King of Kings and Lord of all Lords, One who exalts us to a Dignity infinitely above what any Earthly Prince or Potentate can pretend to ; The place of Honour in the Court of Heaven, and, without the melancholy Ceremonies of Death and Succession, gives to each Son a Crown ; A Crown of Life, a Crown of Glory, a Crown of Righteousness, incorruptible, and that fadeth not away for ever. These are but faint and feeble Representations of the Honours and Happineesses, that accrue to us by being thus related ; But Who can hear even These, without breaking out again into St. *John's* rapturous Reflection,
Behold

Behold, *what manner of Love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the Sons of God !*

2. But I observed, (*Secondly,*) that This manner of the Evangelist's expressing himself, as it spoke the Greatness, so did it also imply *the Freedom of the Gift*. The very Nature of a Privilege seems to carry something of Indulgence and Grace in it ; Something which, though granted upon good Considerations, yet could not in strict right have been challenged. And This is the Case of Christians ; They were in no Condition of meriting this mighty Favour. Much otherwise indeed ; Their Circumstances were poor, and low, and miserable. For what can possibly be more so, than Man corrupted by Sin ? A most lost, most polluted Object, the Servant, the Slave, the Child of the Devil ; bewildred in Darkness and Ignorance, captivated and bound up in Chains of Sin and Folly ; and past the extent of any natural Powers to enlighten, or to release him. Omnipotence only could do it, nay even Omnipotence without Love had not done it to Perfection. But by a hap-

py Conjunction of these Two, we are set free ; Set free the noblest way, not so much as the *Spirit of bondage* and *fear* remaining, but are so made the Servants, as at the same time to attain the *glorious Liberty of the Sons*, of God. Not such by Nature, 'tis true ; but adopted for the sake of Him who is so by Nature, and who in wonderful Condescension is not ashamed to call us Brethren.

My Former Particular took notice, that Some things are required of Us, in order to make good this Adoption. But These are appointed only as Instruments, as Signs, and Seals, and do not so much pass, as record and testify, the Act, and insure the Benefit of it to us. As the Writing of Indenture does not convey an Estate, for the Person's Sealing and Delivering does that, but is only called a Deed, because it testifies the Deed of the Party, and, as such Testimony, secures the Possession to him for whose use it was done : So The Sacraments of the Gospel, when received with Faith and all necessary Qualifications, are only the Means, and Methods of deriving this Sonship upon us. Seals and Evidences

dences of what God does there. But still it is not the Sacrament, but God in and by the Sacrament, that makes us Children. There is no such Merit in the Virtues and Dispositions of the Mind that partakes of them; No such inherent Power in the Matter or the Form, the Words or the Elements, as can by any Efficacy of their own work this mighty Change: All is the Act, the free Gift, the peculiar Blessing of the most High, exalting these things into Effects Myste-rious, and above their natural faculties. And, as the Water, though of all Elements most fruitful, had produced nothing in the first Creation, if the Spirit of God had not brooded upon it; so in the Second Birth it is that Spirit alone that *sanctifies water to the washing away of Sin*, and enables it to bring forth a Child of God. But though such Similitudes as these are of great use, to give us some Apprehension of things that fall not directly under Senses, yet we are not to suppose this should hold in every Circumstance. For between This, and Common Births there is a wide difference, as St. *John* plainly declares, and it is the design of my

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Third

Third Particular to observe, which takes notice

III. Of The Manner how this Sonship is conferred; from those Words, of my Text, *Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.* The meaning whereof seems in short to be thus much. That we are not conceive of This, as of Usual and Natural Births, as if it were produced out of Material Principles, or promoted by Sensual Inclinations; but All here is Spiritual and Sublime; *It is God that beget us of his own will*, and this is done by *the word of truth*, as St. James observes, (Ch. I. v. 18.) Or if you please to take these Expressions, as Some have done, in a Metaphorical Sense, so they import, that no Faculties of our own, no Desires of Sense, no Principles of Reason and Morality can rise so high, there must be Divine Grace, or there can be no Child of God. The thing is true in both Interpretations, and all the Enlargement I shall make upon it, is only to set before you the Reasonableness of this being represented to us under the notion of Regeneration or a Second Birth; and then to describe

scribe the Manner of it's being brought about, as the Scripture hath instructed us in it.

By Natural Birth and Generation it is plain, we come to have a Life, which we had not before. We have a Principle of Motion imparted to us, and from dead senseless Matter are enabled to perform all the Functions that are proper to Humane Nature; Another Creature is produced, of the same kind with those from whence it sprung, and grows up by degrees to the same use of Sense, the same Reason, the same Understanding, the same Desires of what is not convenient, and the same Aversions and Fears of what is hurtful and destructive to it. And in all these Circumstances men are very properly said to be *born again*, upon their Conversion to, and believing in, Christ. The Condition they were in before, is a State of utter Inactivity, and for this reason we find them styled * *dead in trespasses and sins*, and said * Ephes. II. 1. to be *quickned* by the Grace and Spirit of God. They were imprisoned and confined, and the utmost Efforts they were capable of making, are but like the faint Struggles of an Embryo

in the Womb. But this coming to the Birth gives them liberty to exert themselves, and lets them into a new and different Scene of Action. It produces a *New Creature*, as the Scripture terms it, that is ; Such a Newness as a Soul is capable of ; New Notions and Dispositions, and, consequent to these, a New Conversation proceeding from them. So that every such Person is quite another Man from what he was before. And this Alteration conforms us to the Image of him that begot us ; Every thing is pure and Godlike, and expresses a Resemblance to his Essential Holiness. It gives a fresh turn to our Thoughts and Affections, so that we are not acted as before, by the same carnal Apprehensions, nor the same sensual Inclinations. It imprints a new Character upon our Understandings, and gives us a true Sense of Good and Evil, and it puts a quite different Bent upon our Will ; such as disposes us to love what is truly Good, and Spiritual, and Heavenly, and to despise and detest what is Worldly, and Wicked. This is that Likeness of *Species*, which justifies the Metaphor ; The greatest that can possibly happen to a Soul,

Soul, the greatest that a Moral Principle is capable of; and so great, as to render it very significant and proper to say of every such Person, that he is *born again*.

But we know, that, by being born, men become part of a Family, and have a Right to a Child's Share in the Division of the Estate. And This is another good Reason, for mens being said to be *born of God*; because by that means they are let into New Relations, and acquire New Titles. Thus St. Paul tells Christians, *that* * *they receive the Spirit of Adoption*, and by it have a right to call God Father, that they are *Sons*, and *not only Sons, but heirs, heirs of God, and coheirs with Christ*. That they are from thenceforth allied to the whole Family, *that is named of God both in Heaven and Earth*; And, from Aliens, and Strangers, and Enemies, come, not only to be admitted into a strict Alliance with, but to obtain the most honourable, and most advantageous Post in, the Household. And since these Prerogatives among Men are the Effect of Birth and Blood, the same conferred with regard to our Spiritual Kindred, and Divine

* Gal. IV.

Inheritance, is very fitly represented by being *born of God*. For, as *Foreigners*, though the dearest Friends, are not legally qualified for them in Settlements of this World, except in default of Issue, and where the Race is extinct; So here, none who is not of the Family can inherit, and they who are most worthy of it, are first made capable of it, by becoming Children. And for this reason it is, that this Title is so often made use of, and so highly extolled in Scripture; because, whatever Privileges the Rest may imply, yet None can minister that Comfort and Confidence, None can assure our Inheritance, or give us A Pretence to the Glory and Kingdom of Heaven, but this of *Sons* only.

Now for the Manner of working this Change in us, (which was the Other Consideration propounded under this Head) That also carries so great a Similitude to a natural Birth, that no Figure in the World could give us a clearer Idea of the thing. The Act of Generation and Birth gives Being once for all, and, at the instant of coming into the World, the Child, the Heir
is

is born, to all the Rights of his Quality and Family. So likewise in the Sacrament of Baptism, -we have the Spirit of God conferred upon us, which, as it is a Spirit of Grace, is a Principle of new Life to us; and, as it is a Spirit of Adoption, it instates us in all the Privileges that can belong to Children of such a Father: And for this reason our Church, immediately after the Covenant is struck, gives thanks to Almighty God, and acknowledges him *a most merciful Father, for that it hath pleased him to regenerate the Persons then newly baptized with his holy Spirit, to receive them for his own Children by Adoption, and to incorporate them into his holy Church:* As also she most wisely and truly declares, at the beginning of her excellent Catechism, that in Baptism *we are made Members of Christ, Children of God, and Inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven.* But a Member must be cut off, if it be mortified; Children may provoke their Parents to put them by their Birth-right; and an Heir under Age, is such in Reversion, and Hope only. The Natural Parent gives a Principle of Life, but it is such a one as will

soon perish and go out again, if due care be not taken to preserve it. And so it is here: The Spirit of God quickens us upon his first Infusions, but we are to cherish the kindly warmth. God is our Father in the sustaining and nourishing, as well as in the Enlivening part. He knows, the Life that is in us, is subject to perpetual decays, and therefore the same natural Affection, that occasioned our being born His, does likewise engage and assure us of all necessary Supplies to continue His; provided we use what he gives, and employ that Principle of Spiritual Self-preservation. Grace therefore, though it be given at first, yet is not given all at first. There is that proportion given, which makes us Children, but we are commanded ** to feed upon the sincere milk of the word, directed to † grow in grace, and to pray for the increase of Grace, that we may come to the fullness of the Stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus.* A Man may languish under long Indispositions, and be taken with very violent and acute Diseases, and yet recover again. And so he may commit some very foul and grievous Sins, or accustom himself to the

* 1 Pet. II.
2.

† 2 Pet.
III. 18.

Ephes. IV.
13.

the habits of Others that are less, without ceasing to live spiritually. These indeed dim the Candle of the Lord, and eclipse the Brightness of its shine, but they do not put it absolutely out. And therefore God, who knows our wastings and our failings, hath promised his Grace to us, upon the use of proper means. Such as Repentance, and Consideration, the Hearing his Word, and receiving the Sacrament of his Death. These are Spiritual Food and Sustenance; These are our Remedies and Restoratives, ordained to make those that are sick well, and those that are well, better and stronger still. So that there is a mighty difference between Regeneration and Renovation. We can be born but once, because we can live but once; and therefore Baptism, which gives Life, cannot be repeated. But we can recover often, and grow and be nourished often, because we may sink and droop often, and therefore the Lord's Supper, and other Holy Ordinances, should be frequented often, because they are our Medicines, and our Meats, and our Refreshments; And accordingly you see one of our

Collects

* Collect
for Christ-
mas Day.

Collects * begs of God, *that we being regenerate, and made his Children by Adoption and Grace, may daily be renewed by his holy Spirit.* So mighty an Affinity is there between our Natural and Spiritual Condition ; So truly we are said to be *born of God*, not only from the New Production and New Principle, and New Relations that attend this Life, but also from the Manner of giving it, and of sustaining it, after it is once given.

I have only time for one word upon my Fourth and last Head, the Extent of this Benefit, in those words, *As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the Sons of God.* And what a Comfortable Reflection is this ! That there is no distinction of Birth, or Quality, of Sex, Age, or Circumstances in the World ! That They who cannot get Admittance so much as into the Presence or Palace of Earthly Princes, should be capable of Thrones and Crowns with the Great Lord of Heaven and Earth ! That there is no respect of Persons here ! Nothing but Faith and Virtue makes the difference. The Privileges are suspended upon
Terms

Terms put into our own Power, and never denied, never taken away, except upon some personal and voluntary Default. But of This I shall have occasion to speak at large in my next Discourse.

SER-

SERMON IX.

THE N A T U R E

Of the Christian's
CALLING and ELECTION.
Stated from the Parable of the
Marriage Feast.

St. Matth. XXII. 14.
*For Many are called, but Few
are chosen.*

THese Words are the Moral, as
it were, of the Fable, the Ap-
plication of that Similitude,
which went before. For our Saviour,
who had to deal with a most perverse
Generation of Men, found great oc-
casion to exercise his Divine Wisdom,
in

in chusing, not only the most instructive, but the softest and most inoffensive, methods of Discourse. Upon These, as well as some Other accounts, he is very reasonably presumed to have delivered himself so often in Parables. But, because they were figurative and somewhat dark, therefore he frequently closes them with some very Significant Sentence, which does not only result from, but helps to explain the Comparison; and is at once the Consequence and the Key of what had gone before. Of this nature is my Text, and what Relation it bears to the Parable, from the beginning of the Chapter to this Verse, I shall shew you as plainly, and as briefly as I can.

By the *Kingdom of Heaven* here, and in many other places, is meant the Dispensation of the Gospel. So called, because the Doctrine of it both descended from Thence to Us, and is designed to bring us Thither; As also, because This is that peculiar Province, which God hath chosen to exert his glorious Attributes in; his Justice, and Wisdom, and Goodness, and Power, and Truth; All which are most illustriously seen in the Present State of Affairs,

Affairs, which is usually called the *Kingdom of Grace* here; and shall be manifested to all the World in their utmost Perfection, in the *Kingdom of Glory* hereafter.

Now, of the several Steps taken to bring men into this Kingdom, not Any one seemed more astonishing and unaccountable to the World, than That, by which the *Jews*, God's ancient and peculiar People, were rejected, and postponed; and Preference given to the Idolatrous Gentiles, who knew not the true God, nor had hitherto been acknowledged of him. And therefore This surprising difficulty is what our Saviour, by many of his Actions and Miracles, hints would be done; and, by most of his Parables, did not only foretell, but declare how, and why it was done: Of those Declarations there is not Any more full and clear, than this concluded by my Text. Which presents us with the whole Process and Mystery of the Gospel in little; And, from its first being planted among men, carries our Eyes to a vast and distant Prospect, even the final Judgment, and Consummation of all things.

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For in that general Design of the Passage All I think are agreed; however they dissent from each other, as to particular and less material Circumstances. In which differences I shall not at all concern my self at present, but give you a short Draught of the Whole, according to what I apprehend to be the most natural and reasonable Explanation of it.

By the *King* * here, we are to understand God the Father, and the *Marriage he made for his Son*, is the Propagation of the Gospel, and the Salvation of Mankind. This was begun, when he first took upon him humane Nature, and joyned his Divinity to our Flesh; And, continued since, in all the Acts of Love and Condescension, and kind Approaches to his Spouse the Church, till that joyful Supper of the Lamb, when she shall be admitted into the fullness of her Lord's Joy; and all her true Members, who are now in the Quality of Guests only, be from thenceforth inseparably united to him.

To this Marriage † some were *bidden* † Verf. 3. before-hand, that is, The *Jews* by the Shadows of a Typical Law, by the Revelations and Writings of the Prophets

phets, had notice of a Redemption and Messiah to appear. And to These, when the time of the Wedding was come (*i. e.*) when God was manifested in the Flesh, the King sent forth his Servants, John Baptist, the Disciples, and our Blessed Saviour himself, who by his preaching took this Office of inviting the Company upon him; But neither had the former Bidding prepared, nor could the present Invitation prevail upon, them to come. * After this, Others are sent to let them know, that *all things were now ready*, the Provision brought in, and nothing but Guests wanting. That is, The Apostles, after our Saviour's Death, made the *Jews* fresh and more pressing tenders of Salvation; They acquainted them that *the Oxen and Fatlings were killed*, that is, the Son of God was crucified, the true Paschal Lamb was slain, and the Feast waited for them; So that now the Master of the Entertainment had done His part, and only waited for Their Acceptance, and Appearance. But neither was This Message any more successful than the former. Some † Vers. 5. † thought Scorn of the Proffer, as not worth their hearkening to; Some again

again, had engaged themselves in Affairs of another kind, and would not permit their Worldly business to give way, or allow them leisure for this Spiritual Entertainment: And a Third sort, * yet worse than both these, received those gracious Messages with Rage and Spight, flew upon the Servants that brought them, and with a Malice as unreasonable, as it was implacable, abused, and tormented, and murdered them. This was an Indignity so great, an Obstinacy so affected and invincible, that the King was provoked beyond all † Patience, and resolved to take Vengeance on these disobedient and bloody men; (*i.e.*) God gave up the *Jews* to utter Excision for their Perverseness, and Persecutions; He issued out his Commission to the *Romans*, and by Them did not only slay those murderous Wretches, but delivered up their City and Commonwealth to irretrievable Destruction. But, after he had done himself and his Honour Justice upon these base, these bold Contemners of his Majesty, and his Mercy; it was not fit, that all his bountiful Preparations should be defeated and lost; And therefore || the

* Vers. 6.

† Vers. 7.

|| Vers. 8,
9.

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Servants are dismiss once more, with Orders to pick up all the Stragglers, and Poor, for such in effect were the vagabond Gentiles. These received eagerly, what the Former refused with disdain, and * a vast promiscuous number came in, so as to fill the Table, and answer the largeness of the Provision.

* Vers. 10.

Thus far the Purport of several other Parables reaches; but This carries the Matter ~~on~~ yet farther: And shews, that the bare Coming in, and accepting the Invitation is not sufficient, unless the Dignity of the Person, and of the Feast be consulted, and Men come, as so solemn an Entertainment requires.

† Vers. 11,
12.

And therefore † by the *King's* coming *in* to take an account of the Guests, and punishing the Man that wanted a Wedding Garment, is represented, that strict and particular, Examination, which shall pass upon every Christian at the last Day: That Then, the professing the same Faith, being Members of the same visible Church, receiving the same Sacraments, and enjoying the same Privileges, will profit Men nothing, if their Souls in the mean while be either foul or naked, stained with Evil Works, or not adorned with good

good ones; That, however Some may pass upon their Brethren, and not be distinguisht in a Crowd of Believers; yet there will come a time of stricter search, and they must be brought before a more discerning Eye; One that will [separate, not only between Infidels and Believers, those that *come*, and those that *refuse*; but, even of them that do come, between the Hypocrites and real Good Men. And, though but One such be mentioned here, yet that One is the common Representative of all disorderly and careless, of all dissembling and formal Liviers, the Type of Their Wickedness, and of Their Doom. Upon the whole of which Matter, the Refusals of them who would not come, and the Neglect and Miscarriage of Him that did come, but came not duly qualified, our Blessed Lord passes this Reflection in the words now read, that *Many are called but few are chosen.*

So that any Man, who considers at all the Circumstances of this Case, may very easily resolve himself, who in this Parable are the *Called*, and who the *Chosen* of God. All, to whom his Servants

are sent, whether they receive his Invitations or no ; And All, who do receive them, though the gracious End of those Messages be not fully attained ; All, that are bidden and do not come, and all that come, and are thrust out again for not coming as they ought ; These are the *Called*, and these are *Many*. But those that thankfully embrace the good Proffers of Salvation, and come when they are called ; that come with Reverence and Decency ; clothed with the Wedding Garment, the white Robe of Righteousness and Innocence ; that is, who take care to * *walk worthy of the vocation, wherewith they are called* (as St. Paul expresses it) These, and These only are the *Chosen* ; and They, it seems, are but *Few* ; In Comparison, God knows, but very *Few*.

* Ephes.
IV. 1.

Concerning this Notion then, and Who are to be ranked under each of these Divisions, the Controversy is not very considerable. But what should be the Cause of such Disparity in their numbers, mighty Doubts and Disputes have risen. Whence it is, that so many of the *Called*, are not yet of the *Chosen* ; whether from Him who calls,
but

but never intends to chuse all that he calls; or, whether from Them who are Called, but are not fit, or do not qualify themselves, for being Chosen. Which is as much as to say, whether the Damnation of Mens Souls ought to lie at God's, or their own, Door; whether His Election be Absolute, and Arbitrary, and Unconditional, so that Some shall not be *chosen*, though they would never so fain; Or whether it proceed upon Terms of Equity, and such Justice, as we can judge of; so that no Man is rejected without his own Fault; and even those who are not *chosen*, might have been, if they had not been, wanting to themselves. This is an Enquiry of great Consequence. And, to Them who are unprepossessed, and will submit to consider the thing fairly, this Parable, I take it, is capable of giving great Satisfaction. For it shews us plainly what the King did, and what his Subjects did not do; Why many of those who were *called* did not come at all; and Why of those that did come, all were not *chosen*; that is, not approved, and admitted to partake of the Feast. The design of which is to hint at the Rea-

sons of the Gospel's being unsuccessful in any respect, Either to Them that are without, or to Them that are within, and under its Dispensation; And what hinders, that Some, to whom it is preached, do not believe; and that some Believers are yet not saved by that Belief. For the Former sort are represented by the *Jews*, and the Latter by the *person without a wedding garment*: And, to satisfy this Argument, I shall handle each of the Cases distinctly, and consider what Circumstances the Parable takes notice of in Either of them; both Those, which relate to the Person *calling and choosing*, and those, which concern the Persons *called*, but not *chosen*.

First, We are to examine the Case of the *Jews*, set down from the *Second* to the *Eighth* Verse; and to learn thence, if we can, why those who were *called* did not *come*, or (which is the same thing in other words) wherefore Some, to whom the Gospel is preached, do not accept and believe it. And, in order to the resolving this Question, we will look into the Behaviour of Each Party; Of the King *first* that made, and *then* of the Subjects that refused, the Invitation. On

On the King's Part Two things are considerable, The Preparations he made; And the Desire he exprest that men should partake of them.

The Former of these is described in the Parable, by *making a Marriage for his Son, killing his Oxen and Fatlings*, and taking care, that *his dinner and all things should be ready*; For These are properly the Preparing part there. And they seem to answer in the Application to God's sending his Son in our Flesh; The Design and the Accomplishment of that Myltery, in suffering him to be born and to die for us, and all the necessary Provision made for present Conversion and future Happiness. His Desire that men should partake of these Benefits manifests it self, in bidding them to the Wedding, that is, in all sorts of Warnings and Instructions given Men before-hand; by the Light of Nature; by particular Revelations afforded to the Forefathers of these *Jews*; by the Precepts and Promises of the Law; by the clearer Predictions of the Prophets; by the Types and Figures of the Levitical Dispensation; and by all the Methods taken to instruct and prepare the World at a

distance for reaping the Advantages of this Redemption. And again, when the Fullness of time was come, by sending forth his Servants upon a second Message to repeat this Call, at the Appearance of the Son of God in Flesh; And farther yet, when the Espousals were now compleated, when the Spiritual and Divine Feast was set out, and the Table spread, by slaying that Lamb, which is the Food of Souls, dispatching his Messengers yet again and again; putting them in mind afresh, pressing, importuning, conjuring them to accept of his Bounty; and at length resenting their unworthy and unkind Refusals so heinously; and inflicting so severe a Punishment upon their Obstinacy and Ingratitude: And, last of all, when these *Jews* had shewed themselves proof, against so many gracious Means used to reduce them, by granting a fresh Commission for making the same Offers to the Gentile World, that so his Designs of Kindness might not be utterly defeated, but These, by their Compliance, might gain an equal Title, to the Blessings which the Former had forfeited and justly lost, through
their

their inflexible Stubbornness and Contempt.

From all these Circumstances fairly put together, I do not see how we can, with any good Reason, avoid the submitting our Assent to these following Conclusions.

First, That The Redemption of the World by the Incarnation and Death of Christ, was an Act of God's free Mercy, and marvellous Grace. This King did not marry his Son with a design to add to his Happiness or his Honour. Those were perfect before. But merely to exalt and ennoble the Spouse he took. Nor had She any Charms to attract his Love, any Beauty or Comeliness to feast his Sight, but was in her self deformed, and scandalous, and poor. For it was wretched Humane Nature that he married himself to ; He laid aside for a while the Rays of his Glory, to be clothed with the Rags of Flesh ; and a Church * which (though now indeed *without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing*, yet) was, when He first vouchsafed to pity, and to love her, of a quite different Form and Hue. For all her present Purity and Loveliness is owing to her being cleansed

* Ephes.

V. 27.

Reu. I. 7.

cleansed and washed from her Sins in her Lord's blood. No Interest, no Honour was to be expected from a Match so mean, so much below this Prince; No End to be served by it; No Argument to move it, but infinite Kindness and Compassion, that saw the Miseries of wretched Humanity, and tenderly yearned over them; And, when no other relief could be had, condescended to take Our Miseries, and make them his own; that so His Glory and Happiness might become Ours.

Secondly, It follows from hence, *That the Mercy figured here by this Marriage was intended for the Benefit of Mankind.* And This deserves to be taken notice of, because it differs herein from all other such Solemnities, as the Parable shadows it to us under. For, whereas Persons of the First Quality and greatest Worth are usually the only ones, that Princes admit to bear a part in their Rejoycings and Entertainments; Here the meaner and more unworthy sort have the Honour of the Day. The Angels are vastly Superiour to Us, in the Dignity and Excellence of their Nature; yet *Christ*
(as

(as the Apostle observes) took * not on ^{* Heb. II. 16.} him the Nature of Angels, but he took the seed of Abraham. Many of Them too were fallen as deep as We, yet to Us he extended Compassion, and to Them he did not. And therefore, of many Considerations, that recommend this Call to Grace and Salvation, this Condescension is not the least, that, when Both were miserable, and Both undeserving, Those of a Higher Rank were past by, and left out; and They of an Inferiour Condition were pitied and exalted; thought fit to have the Son of God joyned to Their Substance, admitted to sit with him at his Table in his Kingdom; nay to be the very Bride and Beloved of the Lamb himself.

Thirdly, We may likewise gather from hence, *That the Design of this Benefit was universal.* For the Parable plainly describes an Invitation sent to all manner of People. Not to all at once, it is true, but first to the *Jews*, and afterwards, upon Their refusal, to the *Gentiles*. So that, although some were preferred in point of Time and Order, yet both sorts had their turn, and none were utterly excluded.

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The People and City of God had reason to expect the first Proffers, but the Servants that were sent out, and begun with these, did not stop there; For the *Ninth Verse* commands *them out again to the highways, and hedges; and to bid to the marriage all, as many as ever they should find.* This agrees exactly with those large and comprehensive Terms, in which the Apostle's Commission ran, when Christ after his Resurrection charged them, * *to disciple and baptize all nations, to Go out into all the world and preach the Gospel to every Creature.* And I know not what Other Demonstration we would have, of God's designing, that All should partake of this Spiritual Feast, than his taking such Care, that All should have due notice of it; and pressing them over and over, with repeated Messages to that purpose; St. Paul, in his first Epistle to Timothy, seems to argue, that † *God would have all men to be saved from his using means to bring them to the knowledge of the truth.* And, with regard to the Sacrifice of Expiation, He tells the Hebrews || that Jesus was *made a little lower than the Angels, that He by the Grace*

* Matth.
XXVIII.
19.
Mark
XVI. 16.

† Tim. II.
4.

|| Heb. II.
9.

Grace of God should tast death for every man. The Design is not less universal because the Effect is not so ; For St. Peter * upbraids the men, who * 2 Pet. II. brought in damnable Heresies, with ^{1.} denying the Lord that bought them, and so bringing upon themselves destruction. And the Apostle to the Romans enlarges most admirably, to shew the Wisdom and Goodness of Providence, in converting the Obstinacy of the Jews into an occasion of bringing in the fullness of the Gentiles ; that so the Conversion of the Gentiles might be also an occasion of softening the Jews, by working them up to a holy Emulation of that Happiness and Obedience, which those despised Nations had so surprisngly outstripped them in. Some Persons indeed there are, who deny the force of this Reason ; and pretend, that God never intended, that those who stood out, should ever have come in ; that he hardened their hearts, and made it impossible for them to hearken to, or comply with his Calls. But I add, notwithstanding.

Fourthly, That God was very serious in these Invitations, and that the Parable

nable gives us ground sufficient to believe so. It is true, Among Men many things are done merely out of Ceremony and Form; Many proffers made in hopes of being refused; Many Civilities shewn, where nothing less is intended; And what the World calls Complaisance and good Breeding, is frequently not so much the Language, as the Disguise, of the mind: And hard it is to know, whether it proceed from real Friendship, or be the Effect of Formality, or Flattery, or Dissimulation, or Fear. But This cannot possibly be the Case here. For to suppose Almighty God guilty of such mean Arts, is to think most unworthily, and most inconsistently of him. With Him is no Deceivableness, no Deceit: A thing so vile and confessedly base, that They who practice it most, are always ashamed to own it; and therefore use their utmost industry to mask it well. Though Few in comparison are sincere, yet every Man is ambitious, and labours to be thought sincere. And what the very Worst of sinful Mortals detests, is sure a Character not to be ascribed to the Best and Holiest Being.

Again,

Again, As the Nature of God is not capable of any indirect or double Dealing, or false and flattering Pretences, so is there no imaginable Reason, from without, that should incline him to make use of them. He cannot contract an Obligation from his own Creatures, nor can he stand in Awe of their Displeasure. What then should move him to profess Kindness, where none is due? What, where he cannot suffer by with-holding it? What indeed, but his own Infinite and Essential Goodness? Can the Great God of Heaven and Earth gain any advantage by insinuating himself into the Affections, and courting the good Opinion, of poor Worms, who can never profit him by the best of their polluted and imperfect Services? He stands not in need of any Returns our Gratitude can make; Nor is his Happiness defective without them. And Common Sense tells us, that, were Our State independent upon the Favour or Friendship of one another, there would not be such a thing, as a Flatterer or Dissembler in the World. If then this King in the Parable did not design his Invitations should be accepted, why did

did he ever make them at all? But at least, when men refused them, why did he not take them at their word? A Complement, that is merely such, is easily dropp'd: And when men are well enough pleased to be deny'd, they are usually content to spare the trouble of pressing. But is This at all agreeable to the Methods used here for bringing in Guests to the Marriage? If the First Bidding would bear so vile an Interpretation, yet sure the Importunities of a Second and Third Call will by no means endure it. And yet least of all will that Indignation for being so unworthily rejected; The New Commissions issued out to his Servants; The mighty Care of picking up other Guests; And the severe Revenge upon Those, who received his gracious Offers with Disdain. In all appearance, the doing what God all along intended men should do, nay, what he made it necessary for them to do, ought not to have bred so irreconcilable a Quarrel.

We acknowledge indeed, that the Counsels of Almighty God are a vast and dark Depth; and think, it very unbe-

unbecoming poor feeble Mortals, too busily to intrude into, or peremptorily to pronounce concerning, them. But there are some plain Principles so obvious, that all contending Parties cannot but agree in them. That the *Judge of all the Earth* cannot but *do right*, is a Truth universally confess'd. And, though Justice in God may proceed upon Measures not understood by Us, and be perfect above what we are able to comprehend; yet since Just and Unjust, Good and Evil are not arbitrary and unalterable things, we have no reason to suppose, that Justice and Goodness in God are contrary to what we esteem Just and Good among Men. And therefore Men may be excused, if they think, that all the Caution and Jealousy due to the Honour of God's Justice and Goodness have not been observed, by Some, who, out of honest Zeal perhaps, have set up a secret Will in the Divine Decrees, which seems plainly repugnant to the Known Will of his Precepts, and Revelations. For if God will, that Any should hear, and receive, and obey his Gospel; and enjoins this upon pain of Damnation;

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and hath in most solemn manner declared this to be his Will ; and yet at the same time hath another Will to us unknown, which controuls and overrules all this ; and will not suffer such to receive and obey his Word, though they would never so fain ; and then punishes and damns them eternally for not doing so ; Let Them who maintain this Doctrine tell us, how we shall deliver it from such Reflections, upon the Honour, the Justice, the Goodness, the Truth, and (if I may be allowed so to speak) the Sincerity and Common Honesty of the Divine Nature, as Reverence to so Great a Majesty will not suffer me to name. In Matters of so high a Nature, great Allowances may be made for unaffected Mistakes, and Difference in Opinion. But it can be no just matter of blame, to dissent from those Doctrines, the Consequences of which even They that advance them profess to abhor, and yet have not shewn us how they can be avoided. For, so far as yet appears, if This be the case, *our Preaching is vain, and your Faith is also vain.* And therefore we have great Reason to conclude, that God does
not

not obstruct mens honest Endeavours in the use of Outward Means, but leaves them in their full Power ; and that his Decrees are such, as consist very well with the Temper of his Covenants, his Exhortations, his Promises, his Threatnings, his vehement and affectionate Expostulations, his laying the Sinner's Ruine at his own door, so frequently, and so manifestly recorded in Scripture. Were it not thus, what wretched Uncertainties are Christians abandoned to, what terrible Anxieties and Discouragements must they labour under in their greatest Concern? So great, that the best good Man could never tell, what he hath to trust to ; And I know not, whether it might not truly be affirmed, that, upon these Terms, They, to whom Revelation and the Light of the Gospel have come, are of *all men most* miserable.

Some Other Conclusions there are very proper upon this occasion, but those I must be satisfied with referring to my next Discourse.

Now to God the Father, &c.

SERMON X.

THE NATURE

Of the Christian's
CALLING and ELECTION.
 Stated from the Parable of the
 Marriage Feast.

St. Matth. XXII. 14.

*For Many are called, but Few
 are chosen.*

MY Design in the Choice of
 these Words was to treat of
 that Calling and Election,
 whereby Men are at last brought to
 the obtaining that Salvation, which is
 purchased for them by Christ, and
 tendred to them in his Gospel. And
 in

in this Undertaking I have made some Progress already, by a former Discourse.

I. By explaining the Parable of which my Text is the Conclusion, and shewing, who are the *Called*, and who the *Chosen* of God. That in the former Class are to be reckoned All, to whom the Invitations of this King, that is, the Word of God hath come; Whether they *came to the marriage*, upon such Invitations or not; Whether they receive or reject Christ preached to them. And All who came, whether with or without the Wedding Garment; who do receive and profess the Truth, though they do not attain to all the Advantages of a true Faith, and These are *Many*. But by the *Chosen* Those only are to be understood, that thankfully and dutifully embrace the Proffers of Salvation; and, by conforming their Lives to the Precepts of Christianity in Righteousness and true Holiness, are admitted as worthy Partakers of this Divine Feast. And These it seems, in comparison of the Numbers so *Called* as I have said, are but *Few*.

But now, in regard that in order to our right Understanding, and receiving due Encouragement for the Performance of, our Christian Duty, it must needs import us highly to know, whence this so great Disparity proceeds; and how it comes to pass, that, where such Means are plentifully offered, they become so seldom effectual; I proceeded to enquire, so far as we can receive Information from this Parable, whether such Miscarriages and Disappointments are to be imputed to God, or to Mens own selves. Whether He never intended, that All who were *Called* should be *Chosen* notwithstanding their most assiduous Endeavours so to be; Or whether every one so *Called* might also have been *Chosen*, if he had not some way or other been wanting to himself, in the Improvement of such Advantages, as that Call put into his hands. To this purpose I proposed to consider, both the Case of Them, who, when the Gospel was preached to them, did not receive it; and of Those others, who did receive it, but were not saved by virtue of their doing so. The former of These is represented to us from the First to the Ele-

Eleventh Verse, under the Figure of the Obstinate *Jews, i. e.* Them who came not in, when bidden to the Marriage ; The Latter, by the Man who had *not on a Wedding Garment*, who is the Representative of unsincere and Wicked Christians.

I am still engaged in the Former of these Heads, and, for our forming a Judgment of that Case more distinctly, did promise to set before you, both what this Parable relates to have been done by the King inviting his Guests ; and what hindrances it takes notice of in those Guests, as the Causes of their not complying with so gracious an Invitation.

On the King's Part I shewed you the Circumstances of this Parable plainly speak Two things.

I. *The large and magnificent Preparations for entertaining the Guests ;*

II. *The Desire he expressed, and the repeated Endeavours he used, that the Persons invited should partake of them.*

From these Passages explained and applied to the Matter manifestly intended

tended by this Parable, I drew some Inferences, which to me seem unavoidably to follow upon them.

1. That the Redemption of the World by the Incarnation and Death of our Blessed Saviour was an Act of God's free Mercy, and marvellous Grace.

2. That the Mercy, figured here by the *King's making a Marriage for his Son*, was intended for the Benefit of Mankind.

3. That the Design of this Benefit was Universal, or, as our Church in her excellent Catechism most truly expresses it, that the Son of God *redeemed all Mankind*.

4. That in the Methods made use of to prepare and qualify men for rendering this Universal Redemption effectual to themselves in particular, Almighty God was very serious and sincere; and did not, by any fatal Necessity decreed by his secret Will, render it impossible for them to comply with his revealed Will.

I now proceed to some Other Conclusions, for which the Passage before

us seems to be a very just Foundation.
For instance.

5. *Fifthly*, We may observe from hence, that, (commonly speaking) the Manner and Method, by which God calls Men, is the Outward Ministry of his Word, and other Ordinary and Stated Means of Grace. The Servants of this King answer to God's Ministers, regularly sent and appointed in the Church : Whose established Order and Business it is to publish their Message diligently, to make the Will and gracious Intentions of their Master known to all People ; to proclaim the Tidings, and explain the Terms, of Salvation ; To instruct, exhort, reprove, encourage, promise, threaten, according to the Tenure of their Commission ; and, by all prudent and possible Care, to urge, and prevail upon their Hearers, that they would not neglect, or obstinately refuse their own Mercy. So that our respective Congregations are to know, they meet with, and are taught by God, in the Holy Scriptures, in the blessed Sacraments, in the Prayers of the Church, and in all the Ordinances of the true Religion. It was not of our Lord's
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* Luke X.
16.

See Chry-
sost. Tom.
5. Pag.
291. Ed.
Eton.

immediate Disciples alone, but of all their Lawful Successors to the World's End, that those Words in St. *Luke* are to be understood, * *He that heareth You, heareth Me ; and He that despiseth You, despiseth Me ; and He that despiseth Me, despiseth him that sent Me.* And whatever wild Dreams some People may have of I know not what imaginary Inward Calls ; Such, I mean, as pretend to defer their Repentance, or receiving the Blessed Sacrament, or the like, upon the Notion of waiting for some powerful, distinct, and express Call ; and not thinking the Arguments of their Teachers, and the unanswerable Convictions of their own Reason that these things ought to be done, sufficient Motives for going about them ; These, it is much to be feared, are vain Pretences, the Delusions of Melancholy or Sloth, and dangerous Suggestions of the Tempter, who manages such Mistakes to his own wicked purposes, and knows, that Delay is the broad way to Destruction. God hath indeed provided an Inward Call, to second, and set home the Outward upon our Consciences. But he hath not
any

any where that I know of (in the ordinary Dispensations of his Grace and Providence) promised any Inward Call apart from the Outward, where this may be had. He blesses, I mean, the Administration of his Word and Sacraments, and hath fitted these as proper Instruments for bringing us to himself. But he expects we should use these, that by them we may be brought to him. So that (as I had occasion to observe formerly) every Serm. VI. Publick Sermon, every Psalm and Lesson in the Service, every Bidding of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, every pious Exhortation, Admonition, Reproof, is God's Call, and God's Message, conveyed down to us by his Ministers, and such as we must expect one day to account for. The King in this Parable interpreted the Refusal, and the Ill Treatment of his Servants, as so many Indignities done to himself; and revenged them with a Severity proportionable to an Insolence so resented. And the *Jews*, whom those ungrateful Wretches represent, were utterly destroyed, for not hearkening to such Calls as these. This is the Condemnation constantly laid

laid to their Charge, that God *sent his Prophets, and they would not hear.* And That which was Their ruine, will certainly prove Ours in the End; if We, by wicked Delays, and standing out against the like Means, follow the Example of their Obstinacy, and Contemptuous Behaviour.

6. *Sixthly*, From hence I take it to be evident, that this Ordinary and Outward Ministration mentioned in my last Particular, is capable of becoming a Sufficient Call, to as many as are rightly disposed, and willing to make a due Improvement of it. Were not the Matter thus, how could we account for the *Jews* being so dreadfully punish'd, upon denying their Assent and Obedience? How for the *Gentles* succeeding so well, and receiving such commendation, upon a ready compliance with such Calls? Since neither is it any just provocation to withhold our Obedience from, nor any Virtue or real Matter of Praise to give in rashly, to Motives and Means, which are insufficient. It is true indeed, and most readily confess'd, that all the Successes of Outward Means
upon

upon us, are entirely owing to the Blessing and Grace of God, inclining our Wills to accept and submit to them. But the thing I aim at in this Particular is, To urge, that when, in such representations as This before us, and other-like places of Scripture, the Outward means alone are taken notice of, and no mention made of the Inward Assistances necessary to render them effectual; This is a fair Intimation, nay, I think I may say, an undeniable Argument, that God's Inward Call will not be wanting to second the Outward, where men are sincere and faithful, desirous and diligent to examine, and consider, to hearken to reason, (all Passions and Prejudice, and Interest apart,) and resolutely set to follow the Dictates of God and their own Consciences. * *To Him that hath* (says * Matth. our Lord) that does his part, and XXV. 29. *makes the best of that he hath, shall be given, and he shall have abundance.* And again, † *Him that cometh to Me,* † John VI. 37. *I will in no wise cast out.* Nor would I here again be understood, as if I supposed, that even those Actions or good Dispositions, to which the increase of Grace is promised, are things merely

John XV.
5.
V. 44.

John V.
40.
Matth.
XXIII.
38.

meerly in our own power. No such matter. Our very *Having*, our very *Coming*, are of God ; His are the Talents, and His the ability of using them faithfully. *Without Him we can do nothing*, and *no man cometh to Christ except the Father draw him*. But still the Question is, Whether men's being not drawn be not chargeable upon some fault of their own : And if They, who are not drawn, do not in some measure contribute to that unhappiness, and obstruct the kindness which God was otherwise ready to extend to them. Now thus much seems to be implied in the many severe Reproofs and Upbraidings, in the many passionate and tender Complaints, to be met with upon these occasions. *Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life*, says our Blessed Master ; and, *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how oft would I have gathered thy Children, even as a Hen gathereth her Chickens under her wings, and Ye would not ?* And, though our utmost efforts are of no significance without the Divine assistance, yet, that this assistance is not of such a nature as to supersede our own endeavours, but that both these must go hand in hand,

hand, appears from that remarkable Text to the *Philippians*, where St. Paul presses them to *work out their own Salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God who worketh in them to will and to do of his good pleasure.* Phil. II. 12, 13. To this we may add the constant custom of charging mens Faults, and Punishments, and final Destruction, upon themselves, observable throughout the whole Book of Scripture. And, where mention is made of God's hardening men's hearts, if we will make that Book consistent with it self, This is to be meant, of God's doing it by way of Judgment upon wicked Sinners, punishing the Abuse of Means by a total Deprivation of them, Mens own Folly by Infatuation; Thus blinding those Eyes which would not see, and preserving the forfeited lives of some notorious Monsters in Impiety, from that speedy death they had deserved, to make them more awakening examples to Others, by the vengeance which pursues their repeated provocations in this World. But, which comes closest up to the present purpose, The Neglects, and Contempts, and Abuses, threaten'd or revenged in our Bibles, are all along such as men had been

been guilty of towards Outward and Ordinary means. For not being won by these, they are declared inexcusable: Which yet they could not be, were they not provided with such helps, as, attended with their own Industry and Honesty, might have rendered those means successful. For this is but in other words to affirm, what the Holy Spirit frequently does, that the Sinners undoing is not from God, but from himself: not from *Him who desireth not the Death of the Wicked*, but from the Wicked who will *not turn and live*.

7. *Seventhly and Lastly*, This Parable intimates to us, that, though God call men in such a manner as renders them who refuse inexcusable, yet he does it not (ordinarily, if ever at all) in such a manner as is *irresistible*. Hence it is, that we so often find men reproached, with *turning their backs, stopping their ears, hardening their hearts, quenching, grieving, and doing despite to his Spirit*. Hence that rebuke to the Jews by St. Stephen, *Ye stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your Fathers did, so also do ye*. We do with all

all Humility and Gratitude acknowledge, that all the Glory of our Salvation is due to His Working in us, and with us; but this will by no means oblige us to acknowledge, that our Salvation either is or can be wrought without us. We likewise see and know, that God does not call all people alike: To some he vouchsafes to speak louder as it were, and affords more powerful and awakening alarms, than he does to Others. Thus he did to *St. Paul*; but still even That Conversion, though miraculous, was in part owing to the resign'd and honest disposition of his mind, which answered to the Call from Heaven, *Lord, what wilt thou have me do?* *St. Chrysostom* hath employed a great part of one of his Sermons, to shew what a disparagement it is to the Virtue of this Great Apostle, to suppose his Conversion the Effect of Necessity. And, to prove the unreasonableness of that Opinion, He argues, that "if the Miracles here had a power of working necessarily, the same miracles must have produced the same effects upon all occasions. But this 'tis plain they did not do. It was not then

Chrysost.
T. 5. p. 289,
90, 91, 92.
Περὶ τῆς
μῆκους τῶν
προφητειῶν.

U

" (says

“ (says he) the Light, or Voice from
 “ Heaven that wrought this Change,
 “ for that Evidence the *Jews* had at
 “ our Saviour’s Baptism, and yet They
 “ were not changed by it. It was
 “ not his being struck down to the
 “ Ground ; for so were the Officers
 “ who came to apprehend Jesus in the
 “ Garden ; and yet They desisted not
 “ from their wicked attempts. It was
 “ not his Blindness ; for this was mi-
 “ raculously inflicted upon *Elymas*
 “ the Sorcerer too, and yet we do not
 “ find that He was at all the better for
 “ it. And therefore, if we will be just
 “ to St. *Paul*’s Character, we must not
 “ rob him of the Glory of consenting,
 “ but must allow it to be his own Act,
 “ and Deed, and so resolve the Success
 “ at last into his Willingness to com-
 “ ply with this Miracle.

After all which, and a great deal
 more to the same purpose, that Father
 proceeds in the following manner.
 “ This is what I desire you to take spe-
 “ cial notice of ; That God does not
 “ compel them that are unwilling.
 “ Hence it is said, *No man cometh to*
 “ *me, except the Father draw him.* Now
 “ he draws the man that is willing to
 “ be

“be drawn, that lyes indeed, but
“stretches out his hand to be lifted up.
“And, to teach you by these words,
“that he forces None; but if *God* be
“willing, and We be not, the means of
“salvation fall to the ground; Not be-
“cause His Will is weak, but because he
“will not save any man against his
“Own Will. This is very necessary to
“be insisted on, because slothful men
“take Sanctuary in such vain pretences,
“as these; and, when they are urged
“to the Sacraments, and a better Life,
“presently answer, *When God thinks*
“*fit, he will convince, and make me a*
“*new man.* I do not blame such for
“attributing this change to the Will
“of God; but would have them do
“their own parts, and so depend up-
“on His good pleasure. For if thou be
“lazy and negligent, and never set-
“test about a good life, and then pre-
“tendest to wait God's leisure, mat-
“ters are never like to be better with
“thee. For as I said, no man is
“brought to God by violence and
“compulsion, but he is always ready
“to save the willing and well-dispo-
“sed. Men indeed command and will
“have things done, whether their Ser-

“vants will or no ; because Masters
 “among Men do not consult their Ser-
 “vants advantage, but their own. But
 “our Master in Heaven, who is inde-
 “pendent, and would have thee sen-
 “sible, that he is not either in any
 “need of, or at all better by, any
 “thing we can do, desires our Obedi-
 “ence, purely for our own advantage ;
 “And if we pay this with becoming
 “thankfulness, we serve not any occa-
 “sions of His, but reap all the profit
 “of it our selves. And therefore He
 “will not press the unwilling and
 “refractory into his Service, thereby
 “to shew, that He is not beholding to
 “Us for serving, but We to Him for
 “commanding.

From all this it may appear, that
 the Difference of the Disposition is the
 main thing, which makes the Success
 of one man differ from that of another,
 in the use of the means of Grace. 'Twas
 This distinguish'd the persons in the
 Parable : This hindred them who were
 first bidden from coming to the Feast ;
 and brought in the wanderers last call'd,
 from the High-ways : It rendred (that
 is) the Preaching and Miracles of our
 Saviour of so great effect to those who
 in

in all appearance were least, and of so little to them who were most, likely to have profited by them. It is the fondest imagination in the world, to complain, that we cannot edify by our Ministers, and to have Their persons in undue admiration or Contempt. Alas! we judge quite wrong in this matter. The Success of the Doctrine depends principally, not upon the Speaker but, the Hearers. The Tongues of Men or Angels signifie little, if the Heart of those who receive the word, do not receive it with meekness and pure Affection. And the Seed of Grace, as well as that of the Word, may be Scattered to no purpose, though the Sower distribute it with never so liberal a hand, if the Ground Sown be like the Way-side, or the Rock, or the Thorns. In short, the *Jews* have put this point beyond all dispute; who were neither convinced by all the wonders *Jesus* could do, nor perswaded by all that he could say; And yet at the same time, he declares, *he did among them the works which no other man did; and they confess, he spoke as never man spoke.*

II. This leads me to consider, in the Next place, those Hinderances, by which They heretofore, and Wicked men proportionably in all Ages of the World, are kept back from the acknowledgment of the Truth. In order whereunto we must consider the Behaviour of these unthankful Subjects, who refused their King's most importunate Invitations. Now these the Parable hath distributed into Three Sorts, and in each of them hath pointed out a particular Spirit, which seems to have been the Occasion of their Stubbornness and Contempt.

I. The First of these I take to be meant by Them, who, as the Third Verse tells us, *would not come*. And these men's Indisposition seems to be Pride and Disrespect. Such were They, who took offence at the meanness of the Son of God's appearance in the Flesh. A reputed Carpenter's Son, attended with a few illiterate Fishermen; addressing himself to persons of all Conditions, with all the marks of Humility, and Meekness, and Condescension; Living in a State of Poverty, and dying

dying in all the Circumstances of Ignominy and Scorn, and Reproach. These things gave great disgust to the *Jews*; whose minds, prepossessed with false notions of a *Messiah*, expected a temporal Prince and Conquerour; one that should make his way, and erect his Throne, by all the awful methods of Pomp, and Splendour, and Bloody Victories. And therefore finding *Jesus* make a Figure so very opposite to what they had conceived of Christ, they treated Him and his Doctrine with the utmost Contumely and Disdain.

And in Those mens steps may all They be very justly esteem'd to tread at this day, who look upon Christianity as a low and despicable dispensation; A Religion cut out only for such as its first Preachers were, but below men of Letters, and Honour, and Condition: Who are scandalized at the Cross of Christ, and make the Death he submitted to for our sakes a Subject of scornful Railery and profane Scoffs: Who despise the Gospel, as a System of Faith and Morality, fit only for such credulous and easy, such poor and little Souls, as

can give up their Assent to Myſteries above their comprehension, can tamely put up injuries and affronts, crucify themſelves to the World in hope of unſeen and very diſtant Rewards, renounce the preſent pleaſures of Sin, engage in a perpetual War with ſenſual Appetite, and ſtand in awe of that Bugbear, Conſcience. To what purpoſe can it be, to invite Men of ſuch a carnal Palate to this Spiritual Feaſt? Before thoſe Calls can have effect, they muſt abandon their falſe Notions of Gallantry, and Greatneſs, and Good Senſe. They muſt be brought down to ſuch a Temper, as is fit to be treated with, will hearken to better Inſtruction, and is content to acknowledge, *That* God is wiſer than We; And, *that* He is the beſt Judge, what Virtues are beſt qualified to perfect the Nature himſelf gave us, and what meaſures were moſt proper to be taken for repairing the breaches Sin had made upon it: *That* He, who alone can forgive Sin, hath alone right to determine upon what conditions it ſhall be forgiven, and to chooſe his own Sacrifice. And, *that* it becomes loſt Wretches to admire and adore his Good-

Goodness, and to conclude, that the Methods of their Redemption were certainly adjusted with infinite Wisdom; what Foolishness soever vain Man, when proceeding upon the false principles of Worldly prudence, might be apt to suspect in them. Till this *superfluity of Naughtiness* be pruned away, till Men entertain reverent apprehensions of God, and are satisfied, that *His ways are not as Our Ways, nor His thoughts as Our Thoughts*, though ten thousand Messages were sent to call them to *the Marriage*, they are like to continue the same sturdy, haughty Jews still; and *will not come in*.

2. Another sort are mentioned v. 5. who, upon pretence of some more important concerns, made *light of this Feast*, and went, *One to his Farm, Another to his Merchandise*. They gave the Messengers the hearing, but did not think the Invitation worth acceptance, when it must hinder other Business. And such are all They now, whom Riches, and Preferments, and worldly Cares keep from becoming good Christians. The Feast is what they like well enough, provided the King would so far condescend, as to
ad-

admit them, when they are at leisure to wait on him. They have nothing to object against Religion, but confess the advantages it offers to be very noble and alluring ; And Good Men they fully design to be at some more convenient Season ; But at present their hands are so full, that till they can disengage themselves of some weighty and indispensable affairs, it is not possible for them to attend to that, which they wish with all their hearts they were free for. Now here is the main Difficulty, that God will not accept of divided Affections ; This Feast requires a new Appetite, and a refined Taste ; it expects the Chief of our Pains, and the most serious of our Thoughts. This is the *Camel*, that cannot get *through the Eye of the Needle*, and renders it impossible for such, as *trust*, and delight, and place their happiness in *Riches*, or any present Enjoyments, so as for their sakes to neglect and disesteem a future and Spiritual Good, even to *enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*. But with these Men I propose to discourse more particularly hereafter, and shall therefore wave entering into the Argument with them now.

Mark X.
24. 25.

Serm. XI.

3. A *Third* Sort of People, yet worse than both the former, we read of at the *sixth Verse* ; who, not content to reject the Invitation, fell foul upon them that brought it ; They took the *Servants*, and *entreated them spitefully*, and *slew them*. These gave themselves no trouble about making excuses, but added to their perverse Rudeness, Cruelty, and Malice, and Rage ; or, to say the softest thing such behaviour will bear, the Fury of an undisciplin'd and mistaken Zeal. And how blind, how blood-thirsty this was, our Lord hath acquainted us, in that prediction of his Disciples Sufferings, that *the time was coming*, when *whosoever killed them*, *should think he did God Service*.^{John XVI. 2.} Such were heretofore the Crucifiers of our Blessed Saviour. Such the Persecutors of the Apostles and Primitive Christians ; And such are all those still, who openly oppose the Name of Christ, vilifie his Ministers, and are profess'd Patrons of Infidelity, and Profaneness ; Such also They, who, under pretence of more vigorously promoting or maintaining what they call the Truth, attack those of a contrary opinion with Sword, and Fire, and

and Faggot: Who rend and tear their Saviour's Mystical Body in sunder; and advance that (not unchristian only, but even) unnatural Principle, that it is the duty of One Member, to pluck out, and to cut off Another.

That which aggravates the Ingratitude of these Refusals yet more, is the very nature of the Invitation it self. Now This was not to Labour and Hardship, but to a Marriage, a Feast of Joy, a King's Feast; To which it is a mark of singular favour, and a mighty condescension, to be so solicitously importun'd, so kindly received. And the Christian Religion is very fitly resembled by this Figure, both in comparison of that Yoke of Servitude it delivers us from, and with regard to the exquisite Satisfactions, the unspeakable Glories, which all who embrace it sincerely are thereby made partakers of. Had we been call'd to Toil and great Drudgery, even so God had a right to command our Obedience; Had he bid us do some unprofitable, some very harsh and unpleasant thing, we ought not to have declin'd it. How much rather should we comply, when he says,
Come

Come unto the Marriage? And sure this single Circumstance, that Men will not be perswaded to their own advantage, is sufficient to shew us, where the fault truly lyes: And that, when the Master of the Feast, after having made such provision for his Guests, and done so much to bring them to it, is requited only with Slights, and Obstinacy, and Malice; Wicked Men are reprobated and shut out, not because God did not do all that it became a gracious King to do; but, because, when they were bidden in the most affectionate manner, yet they were not, would not be, worthy.

II. Having spoken so largely to the case of Them, who when the Gospel is preached to them, do not receive it; I come now very briefly to consider That Other, of *such as do entertain and profess, but yet are not saved by it.* For This answers to the Person, who did come, and yet was afterwards thrust out for want of a *Wedding-Garment.* What this Garment signifies, seems not very hard to be understood. Most Interpreters agree it to be *Good Works in general,* to which I would only beg leave to add,

add, *such works done out of a Principle of sincere Obedience.* For, since the want of this Garment does not appear to have been discovered, till the Master came in to see and examine the Guests; though the Circumstances in Parables are not to be too curiously insisted upon, yet I presume it is not amiss to take in Inward Holiness here, in opposition to a dissembled formal Shew of Religion. Now This is what may be so nicely wrought, that no humane Eye shall be able to distinguish it. But God will be sure to unmask the Hypocrite; He sees through all our Disguises, and will one day sever, not only between the openly Righteous and the Wicked; but between Him that is Righteous in reality, and Him that is so in Affectation and Appearance only.

This then is a seasonable warning
 Phil. I. 27. to all of us, that *our Conversation be*
 Ephes. IV. *such as becomes the Gospel of Christ;*
 23, 24.
 1 Pet. III. that we take care to *be renewed in the*
 15. *Spirit of our Mind, and to put on the*
 Ephes. VI. *Inward Man, which after God is form-*
 6. *ed according to Righteousness and true*
Holiness; that we sanctifie the Lord God
in, and Do his will from, our Hearts.

This

This proves, that our being received into the Number and Congregation of the Faithful, partaking in the same Priviledges, and the same Instructions, joyning in the same Prayers, and the same Sacraments; doing some outward acts of Piety and Charity: that All this, I say, will avail us nothing, if our hearts be rotten at the bottom; if we be not sincere, and stedfast, and uniform in our Duty. Such Men may impose upon the World, and by degrees upon Themselves too; but, *Be not deceived*, there is a stricter Search to come, and *God is not*, cannot be, *mocked*. A Man may lie within Christ's fold, and yet be no better than a *Wolf in Sheeps Clothing*: But the Shepherd will be sure to find him out, and to deal with him accordingly. In a word, it is not the *Form* but the *Power of Godliness*, that must save us. This unworthy Comer did no more eat of the Feast, than They who came not at all: And at the Last day, the matter will come much to one, whether we be reckoned among *Hypocrites* or *Unbelievers*; since the Great Judge hath already declared, that the Portion of both shall be in a place of Matth. XXIV. 51.
dark-

Luk. XII.
46.*darkness and weeping, and gnashing of
Teeth.*

Now that this walking unworthy our Christian Profession, as well as not professing Christ at all, is from our own fault, I need not, after what hath been said already, take any pains to prove. It may suffice to refer my Reader back to the former Considerations; since the very same Advantages and Assistances, afforded Men for disposing them to believe the Truth, are at least as plentifully afforded for disposing them to practise it, when they do believe it; And the very same Indispositions and vicious Qualities, which hinder men from entertaining the Christian Doctrine, do likewise obstruct the conforming their lives in good earnest, to the Doctrines they entertain. The same is farther manifest from this Person's punishment here, and from his being *Speechless*; struck dumb with Guilt and Confusion. Which fairly intimates to us, what is most certainly true; That, of all Men living, They who pretend to be Christians will have least to say in their own excuse, if they lead wicked lives: since This is in effect to profess one Rule,

Rule, and act by another; and to live, not only in opposition to God and his Laws, but under a perpetual upbraiding of their own Breasts, and in a perfect and constant contradiction to themselves.

Now All this tends directly to the End I chiefly aimed at in the Choice of this Subject. Which is, to remove those discouragements to Repentance and a Good Life, which some weak Minds may labour under, from a mistaken Notion, that these things will, either be done without us, or not effectually attain'd even by our most laborious and conscientious Endeavours. And though it may be objected, that Parables afford but little matter for solid Argument; yet the Cause I have undertaken will not be much weakned by that pretence, if it be remembred, that we may, and ought to argue from Parables, so far as the Reason and plain Design of them leads us; And that nothing here hath been advanced beyond that, which is not (I hope sufficiently) evinced by other expresse Texts of Scripture. Let us not then flatter our selves with little Shifts, and take Sanctuary in the dark excuses of

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abso-

absolute Reprobation and Election ; For, be assured, that, at the General Day of Account, a new and different Scene of things shall open : And what Cloaks soever Men may contrive to cover their shame in the mean while, every mouth shall then be laid in the dust, *All flesh shall not only be, but acknowledge it self to be guilty before God ; And He be justified in all his Doings, and clear when he is judged.*

The Sum then of what hath been said upon the matter is This: *That God calls freely, whom, and when, and how he pleases ; that every body is Called to whom the Word of Salvation is sent ; and Called in such a manner, that if They, who live under the dispensation of the Gospel, do not hear, and receive, and profit by it, the Fault and the Punishment will be Theirs.* That this hearing and receiving, or (which is the same thing) *coming when Called*, implies, not only a Belief of what our Saviour hath taught, but living in agreement to the Principles Christians profess to believe. That They who wilfully fail in either of these Points, cannot be of the Number of God's *Chosen* : They may be
Called,

Called, and not *Come* ; they may *Come*, and yet be thrust out as unworthy. And none are the *Chosen*, but such as partake of the Feast. From whence we may infer, that the Election of God proceeds upon certain Terms and Qualifications ; And, although Men are *Called* by an Act of Mercy purely arbitrary, and without any respect to their Behaviour, yet they are not *Chosen*, so. Freely indeed they are, because not for any desert or real worth of their Best Works ; but conditionally still, because not without Good Works. So that these Works, though incapable of being the *Meritorious*, are yet the *Instrumental* Cause of our Election and Salvation. Hence Theophylact says, *That we are Called is entirely Gods act ; but whether we be Chosen or no, will depend upon our Selves.* Theoph. in loc. Hence a much more incontestable Authority than His warns Christians, *that they* 2 Pet. I. 10. *give diligence to make their Calling and Election sure* : Which implies, that without their own diligence these things will not be secured to them. And indeed, as the Commentator I just now mentioned observes, Because God is so very kind and bountiful in

doing His part, and Men so very negligent and insensible in Theirs ; He bids, but *they who are bidden are not worthy* ; this is the true reason, why so many are called, and yet so few are chosen.

- I discharge my self of this Subject, with that eminent passage of the Son of Sirach, very apposite to our present purpose. Say not thou, *It is through the Lord that I fell away, for thou oughtest not to do the things that he hateth.*
12. Say not thou, *He hath caused me to err, for he hath no need of the sinful man.*
14. God made man from the beginning, and
15. lest him in the hand of his Counsel : If thou wilt, to keep the Commandments, and to perform acceptable Righteousness.
17. Before man is Life and Death, and whether him liketh, that shall be given him.
20. But the Lord hath commanded no man to do wickedly, neither hath he given any man license to sin.

Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Three Persons, and One God, be all Honour and Glory for evermore. *Amen.*

SERMON XI.

WORLDLY HINDRANCES

NO EXCUSE

For the Neglect of

Religious Duties.

St. Luke XIV. V. 23, 24.

And the Lord said unto the Servant, Go out into the High-ways and Hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled :

For I say unto you, that none of those men, which were bidden, shall taste of my Supper.

THE Divine Discourses, with V. 1.
which our Lord entertained
the Company, while dining
with one of the chief *Pharisees*, made
X 3 such

V. 15.

such impression upon them, that a certain Person then at meat with him, broke out into these words, *Blessed is He, that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God.*

V. 16.

Hereupon our Saviour takes occasion to shew, that this Blessedness, great as it is, was not however embraced with that eagerness and satisfaction, nor sought with all that industry, which it most justly deserved. And, for the Illustration of this sad Truth, the Successes of the Gospel, and the different Reception it found among Men, are represented under the Figure of a *Great Supper* prepared, and the Behaviour of the Guests invited to it. Some absenting themselves upon frivolous pretences; Others rudely refusing the Civility; And the Master of the Feast by this means driven to furnish his Table, with strangers of a meaner Quality; and full of just Indignation and Resentment against those unworthy People, who denied to grace his House with their presence, and put such a slight upon his kindness.

This is the Substance of the Parable, and the Applications of it are various. For, whether we respect the First eminent

ment discrimination made between the *Jews* and the *Gentiles*; Or whether That more continuing one, of the several Degrees and Qualifications of Men in all Ages and Countries; It sets before our Eyes a lively Image of Both, and is, in Either sense, capable of great Use for our Instruction and Improvement.

Concerning the Former of These, wherein the *Jews* and *Gentiles* are concerned, I have * already spoken so *Serm. IX. largely, that it will be needless again x. to insist upon it. And therefore the only Reflection I shall make at present upon this sense of the Parable, regards one expression peculiar to this place. Which is, That those *Gentiles* fetched from the *High-ways* and *Hedges*, are said here to be *Compelled to come in*; Not from any external or irresistible Necessity made use of to reduce them; But by the Evidence of Miracles, By the powerful Convictions of Truth, By the strength of Arguments, By repeated Messages, By all the prevailing Arts of a holy Importunity; Which subdued their Wills, and brought over their Affections, and, in a manner, extorted their Assent, while Lust and

X 4 Worldly

Worldly Inclinations perswaded the contrary. So that this Expression of *Compelling*, means only an exceeding Care, and solicitous Application to win them over ; And the marvellous Efficacy of those Methods at last, notwithstanding the Appetites of corrupt Nature, the Prejudices of Education and long Custom, and all the Difficulties, which the Habits and the Love of Evil could raise in Minds violently bent against any such Compliance. And, when They had thus accepted the Invitation, then follows a severe, though most deserved sentence of utter Exclusion, upon those other insensible ungrateful Creatures, who had provoked this Good Man of the House, and affronted his Intentions of favour toward them, by the obstinacy and folly of excluding themselves.

To proceed then. The Relation this Parable bears to Persons of several Degrees and Qualifications, whether *Jews* or *Gentiles*, is not less worthy our regard. The Event of the Gospel's first setting out, so different among the Poor, the Unlettered, the notorious Sinners ; from what it was with the Wealthy, the Learned, the seeming Righteous.

Righteous. The Men of splendid Fortunes and eminent Posts deriding its Doctrines of Humility and Meekness, Self-denial and Contempt of the World ; while those of inferior Condition, whose Spirits and Tempers were of a size with their Estates, submitted gladly to Them. The persons of Study and Attainments deluding themselves with vain Sophistry, and scorning the sublime Mysteries of its Faith ; while those of Honester Minds, and Less Subtlety subdued their Reason, and brought every proud aspiring Thought into Captivity to the Power, and Wisdom, and Truth of God. The pretenders to Sanctity, and rigid Observers of Ceremony and Tradition, presuming upon their own Merits for Justification ; while Others, of a Conversation more liable to Censure, with thanks and joy inexpressible, laid hold on the Sacrifice and Propitiation of Another ; and, conscious of the Impotence of Works alone, sought Salvation by the *Righteousness of Faith*. So that, in each of these respects, those who *were bidden*, that is, who had received most from God, and ought to have been the forwardest in Duty
to

to him ; stood out ; And They, whose Character was less considerable, and less could be expected from, were found most ready to express their sense of his Goodness, and most desirous to partake of it.

Once more ; There is yet Another Interpretation of this Parable, accommodated to the Circumstances of those People, among whom the Gospel is already profess'd, and established. For the End of Our Teaching and of Your Believing being Practice, as the End of that Practice is the Saving of Men's Souls ; The Kingdom of Glory hereafter is no less shadowed out by this Feast, than the Kingdom of Grace here. And consequently, All that neglect their Duty, and prefer the Business, or Enjoyments of This World, before their Concern for the Next, do refuse the Invitations to this Spiritual Supper, and incur the Guilt and the Condemnation implied in the Text ; As, on the Other hand, They, who, notwithstanding all the disadvantages of Person or Fortune, conform to the Rules of holy Living, and make Heaven their first and greatest care ; These are the Men who fill the House, and partake

taste of that Supper. And, This signification being equally proper, and more pertinent and suitable to Our Condition than Either of the Former ; I shall endeavour to fix my own and your attention upon it, by considering these two General Heads :

First, *The Justice of those Men's losing Heaven and Happiness, who, for any Worldly Respects, refuse the proffers of it made to them.*

Secondly, *The Great Mercy and Goodness of God in the means used for the Conversion of those who do accept, and profit under, them.* For upon these Two Points the whole Substance of the Passage turns, and They together make up the Moral of this Figurative Representation.

I. Let us consider, *First, The Justice of God in debarring those Men any Access to Heaven and Happiness hereafter, who refuse the proffers of it made to them here.* For that is the Importance of the Twenty fourth Verse, *I say unto You, that none of Those men which were bidden, shall taste of my Supper.*

Supper. This, though last in order of the Text, yet because depending upon that which is first in the Parable, I chuse to begin with. And, for the clearer Manifestation of the Matter before us, These two things should be attended to :

(1.) *The Character and Condition of the Refusers ; and then,*

(2.) *The Insufficiency of those Excuses they made for themselves.*

I. *The Character and Condition of them who absented, is easily to be gathered from the Excuses made to soften their Refusal.* Three whereof are positively alledged here, as sent back by Three Persons respectively. The first said,
 * *I have bought a piece of Ground, and I must needs go and see it ;* The second is, *I have bought five Yoke of Oxen, and I go to prove them ;* And the third, *I have married a Wife, and therefore I cannot come.* The Two former of These will fall under the same denomination, and the ground of their absenting seems to proceed from the same Cause ; Which is, *The Love of the World,*

* *V. 18, 19,*
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World, and immoderate pursuits of Business and Riches. For, the Wealth of those Eastern Countries consisting partly in Land, and partly in Cattel, Avarice is the distemper common to them both. The Third is more properly reduced to Love of Pleasure, and Fondness of Sensual Delights ; which carries some signs of a worse and more untractable Disposition along with it. Thus much Some have thought intimated, by the differing Forms in which the Answers are returned. For, whereas the Purchasers of Land and Oxen, make a shew at least of Civility and Modesty, desire the Servant to make their Excuse, and express some sort of Concern, that their Weightier Affairs detain'd them ; He that had married a Wife, in a more blunt and sullen manner, replies roughly, *I cannot come* ; A Reply, which speaks that Air of Scorn, usual in Men abandoned to Sense, and Appetite ; Who disdain every Thing and every Person, whose Business and Aim it is to divert them from such present Gratifications. This likewise is farther remarkable in all Three ; That our Lord introduces, not the bold and daring Sinners, defiers of God

God and good Manners, and such as by long shameless Vice have worn out all Distinctions between Good and Evil ; But such as indulge those Cares, and those Pleasures only, which in their own Nature are lawful and allowable. He sets before us, not the Vile Oppressor, the Impious Perjured, or the Actors of Violence and Rapine, of Forgery or Fraud ; But Men intent upon their own Affairs, Patterns of Provident and Honest Industry, so far as the Quality of the Things themselves is concerned. Had he done otherwise, we should be apt to fancy, that no degree of Anxiety had been Criminal, so long as our hands were clean of Injustice and Deceit ; As we were cautious not to heap polluted Treasures, nor give our selves the liberty of being foul and dishonest in our Dealings. Or Had he instanced in Adulterers, in Lewd and Impudent Sensuality, that prostitutes Mens Souls, their Bodies, their Tongues, to Filthiness and Lust ; We might imagine none could be to blame, in giving scope to loose Desires, and fleshly Satisfaction ; And that no Bounds, no Laws restrained our Pleasures, where Modesty and Decency

Decency were observed, where no Man's Property had been Invaded, no injured Bed, or violated Honour, could be laid to our Charge. But now by producing honest Purchases, and honourable Marriage, he plainly teaches us, That even the most Innocent Profits and Pleasures may cease to be Innocent in our manner of using them. As, If they engross our Hearts, and draw us off from better Thoughts and Practices; If they intrude upon our Spiritual Affairs, vitiate our Affections, and, in a word, grow to Excess, or prove Unseasonable. For, how reasonable soever these Allegations appear'd to those who made them here, and do no doubt still, to Millions more that urge them daily; yet you see they found no favour with Almighty God. These Men of Honest Business, and Innocent Delights, are notwithstanding declared to be unworthy; and all their Avocations, supposing them both real and important, could not, nor ever will acquit the Persons, or bear out their refusal to attend upon higher Duties. These are the *Bidden*, the *Ungrateful Wretches*, whom Christ rejects with Anger, and not one of them is admitted

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to taste of his Supper. Which brings me to the second branch of this Argument.

II. *The Insufficiency of those Excuses made for not complying with this Invitation.* And This appears much more from the Thing designed by the Parable, than it does by any express words in the Parable it self. There we are left to gather, that there was Reason good, why the Guests should have preferred this Feast, before their own Worldly Advantages, and Delights. But, in the Benefits of the Gospel, Goodness and Truth in This, and Glory in the next, Life ; the Obligation and Necessity of making these our first care, approves it self to every common Understanding. As will soon appear, Whether the *Person Inviting*, the *Feast it self*, or the *Causes that detain Men from attending it*, be regarded.

I. *The Person Inviting us is God.* And this alone is cause sufficient why we should come. In Humane Conversation we may make great Distinctions ; and proportion our Respects according to the Quality, or the Friendship, of those that ask our Company. With Them,

whom

whom Birth or Fortune make our Equals, we can be bold, and use those Liberties, which good Breeding will forbid to Them above us. And, if a mighty Prince, or kind Benefactor, a Patron and a Friend require our Presence, all our Affairs must be dispensed with ; all Business and Diversion laid aside, to testify our Gratitude and Honour, and nothing waited on but He. Shall we not then obey the Gracious Offer, when the Great King of Heaven, and Lord of Lords, vouchsafes to call us ? He is our Best, our Only Friend ; From Him we derive all our Comforts, all our Hopes, nay even our very Selves ; He commands all our Love and Thanks, and He deserves them all. To suffer other Objects to possess our Hearts, in Opposition to, or Competition with Him, is a fault ; and to divide our Affections is to rob him. Our Mind, our Soul, our Strength, the Whole of These is his just Tribute ; and those Men are false, unthankful, and unjust, who put the trifles of a perishing Life, into the balance with their God and Duty. For how reasonable soever our regards may be to these things, when considered in themselves,

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selves, and with relation to our present Conveniences ; yet they lose all their value, and cease to be of any Consideration, when set against our Obedience to that Great King, this Gracious Master, this kindest of all Friends. Would the Hungry and the Naked, think you, object, that Work and Begging must be followed, when sent for by his Prince, allowed to tread his Courts, and eat at his Table ? Yet such and greater is the Distance between Almighty God, and all the Sons of Men. The poorest Begger, and the meanest Slave, is less beneath the Majesty of Monarchs, Than even those Monarchs are below the Majesty of God. Yet does this God invite, yet does He importune us, *Such is the honour all his Servants have.* Well then may that great Master of the Feast be angry, when such deny his favour, and put him off with vain pretences. He cannot but condemn them, and they, if they would reflect or think at all, must needs condemn their own folly, For (which is more) These Calls are not to our Duty only, but to our Interest too ; as will appear, if we now descend to consider,

2. *The Nature of the Feast it self, and what is figured by it.*

2. When Men provide their dainty Meats, some weightier Matters may come in between, and hinder the paying our respects. And in such case our loss is not very considerable; A courser Meal at home, instead of higher feeding, which Nature misses not, will serve the turn as well. But here the Feast is very Sustenance and Life, the only Thing by which our Souls subsist; and They, who do not come hither, must look for nothing, but Languishing and Death, Despair and Misery. For our Condition lies in wide Extremes, it admits no middle State betwixt Heaven and Hell; and they who do not eat Bread with Saints and Angels in the Kingdom of God; are cast for ever into utter Darkness, and pass infinite Ages in weeping and wailing, and gnashing of Teeth; in Regions of Horror, and the dismal Society of Fiends and Devils. When therefore this Proffer, mentioned in the Parable, is made to needy Man; when He is called to sit and feed with God; The Invitation is, to fill our Souls with all manner of Graces and Virtues now;

and with all the fullness of Eternal Bliss, when Death translates them to another State. This is to ask them if they will be Happy ; Happy beyond their desert, beyond their comprehension, beyond their largest wishes and desires. It is to call, to press them to it. And Who in his right mind will deny such a proffer as this ? Who can suppose, that Any engagement ought to obstruct him in the pursuit of it ? Who can excuse so unreasonable a refusal, I do not say, to God, but to His own self ? Most certain it is, All Men agree in this design, of being Happy : All seek the same End, though they seek it by different means. But 'tis as certain too, that He, who made Us, and our Happiness, hath told us, That *in His presence alone is true Joy* ; and They who do not seek, They who do not accept it there, whatever satisfactions else they may find or fancy, all these will prove but flattering empty dreams at last ; and *good were it for such men if they had never been born.*

3. *The Causes Parallel to those assigned in the Parable for keeping Men away, deserve to be closely considered.* For the Love of Riches, the Incumbrances of

a worldly Life, and the Indulging of Sensual Delights, are of very fatal Consequence to the Soul. It may be alledged indeed, in their vindication and excuse, that the Parable supposes them to be only such Cares, and such Pleasures, as in their own nature are honest and unblameable. But yet this does not acquit those of guilt who are too eager in the pursuit of them. For it is the part of a Good, as well as a Wise Man, to carry his Eye forward to the Consequences of Things; And the Christian Religion expects, that we should no more addict our selves to those Passions and Engagements, which are sure to have ill effects upon us, than to those that have an inherent malignity, and are downright vicious in themselves. So that, although the Concerns of a Man's Calling, and the prudent contrivances of raising a Fortune fairly, though every gratification of our fleshly Appetites, Every recreating of the Mind, be not absolutely forbidden; yet when they exceed in their Measures, when they get within us, and gain upon our Affections, when they loosen our Principles, and detain us from matters of a higher and more

lasting Importance ; they then become sinful. And for this reason ought they to be used always with great Temper and Moderation, because they are apt to betray us to these Inconveniences. The Dangers rising from them are not the less, but in some respects greater, because the Things are lawful. For of those Men, who are not utterly abandoned to Wickedness and a Reprobate Mind, More, it is probable, perish by the abuse of Innocent and Good things, than by the Love or the Commission of things positively Evil. In these the Offence soon manifests it self ; Here Reproof, Reason, and Remorse of Conscience, strike in, and check an open breach of Duty ; There needs not much sagacity to discern things palpably unlawful ; But where the Fact it self, or the Object we are conversant about, does not fall under such plain Censure, there it is easie to mistake in Circumstances and Degrees. For here Men neither have, nor can have, any certain Rule to guide them ; The Measures of Business and Pleasure are not to be fixed, but vary daily ; According to the Constitution of the Person,

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The Necessities of his Condition, The present face and juncture of Affairs, and a thousand other unforeseen Emergencies; So that more or less may be allowed, to One Person, or at One Time, or upon One Occasion, than can to another. All the Direction this case is capable of, is only that we avoid Irregularity and Excess, but We are Judges still of that Irregularity and Excess, for Christian Prudence is the only thing that can determine it. And from hence proceeds the Hazard of such actions, That Men are apt to be too partial to the side of the World and the Flesh; They know these things are not directly sinful, and This supports them in the love and practice of them; This gives them Confidence and great Security, and they are very hardly brought to acknowledge or to mend a fault, or to impose severe restraints in those cases, where God permits a Liberty and Use of the thing in Question. And besides, Here the Necessities and Comforts of Life fall in, and add fresh force to the Argument. Ease, and Subsistence, and the Care of Families, when seconded and urg'd by Inclination, find it an easie matter

to influence the Reason, and over-bear Religion too in time. Men know and own, that God is to be served ; but the same God, they tell you, hath so ordained, that their Necessities and Conveniences should be served too ; And therefore He (they hope) will not forget, that they obey him even in these cares ; and cannot take it ill, if their attendance upon his Will in the Constitutions of his Providence, should interfere now and then with their observance of his Laws and Worship ; For both they cannot do ; They wish with all their hearts they could ; but they trust they serve him very acceptably even in what they do.

Such are the vain pretences, which worldly-minded People make, to cover that neglect of God, which they are ashamed to confess ; and to ruine their own Souls by deceitful colours of honest and lawful Practices. But pray my Friends Consider ; God sets us in the World ; and, for our humiliation, hath appointed us a life of Trouble and Industry, and Labour. By These he gives leave, nay he commands, that we should provide for our selves, and those that depend upon us ; But
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he does not mean that this should extend so far, as to shut out Him, from our Regard and our Thoughts. We are to use, but we are not to serve the World. God gave Man large Dominions, and made him Lord of the Creatures here below. But when our hopes, our labours, and our delights, are placed upon these objects; we then degrade our selves, lose our Original Prerogative, and that Dominion turns to Slavery. We should enjoy the Gift, and love the Giver, but we must not slight the Giver, and dote upon the Gift. We must employ some time upon our Business; A greater or less proportion of time according as our business happens; But Body and Estate must not swallow the Soul; The concerns of a moment must not be prefer'd to Eternity; Nor may we ever follow the World so close, as not to be at leisure to be saved. This may take up Some of our Love and our Thoughts, but God must always reign, and sit Supreme, in all our Thoughts and Endeavours, and Affections. And therefore mighty caution and reserve is necessary in this matter of Worldly cares, because the Present is exceeding
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* Matth.
VI. 24.

apt to engross us, and we know who hath told us, that * *God and Mammon cannot both be served.* In short, All we do, and All we seek here below, must be in subordination to somewhat nobler and better above ; and should never be permitted to juggle out our first and great Concern, *Gods Righteousness and Kingdom.* When this Great Master of the Feast invites us, we must leave all, and follow Him ; prefer His Provision before our Own, and readily obey the gracious Summons. Heaven and our Souls require the best of our Care ; And, believe me, it is not a little care that will suffice for these purposes. Our Passions must be mortified ; our Desires resigned ; our Affections raised and fixed upon a better Country. And this is a work that will ask more of our time and pains, than men seem generally well aware of. Let any of us but make the Experiment ; Let a man single out One darling Lust, and see how many conflicts, how long practice it will cost him, perfectly to subdue That One. And this will soon convince him, how unreasonable it is, to think Salvation a Work by the by ; and how unworthy they
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are of Eternal happiness, who will afford no time for Religion, but merely that which hangs upon their hands ; How impudent a thing it is to serve God, only when we have nothing else to do ; How unequally those Men divide themselves, who spend so much upon the World, and so little upon Heaven ; who pretend perishing Interests and Engagements, and involve themselves in endless Pursuits and Projects, about the less, the trifling advantages ; and leave no time for the greater and more substantial. This is our Case, and This is our Danger, when even the most Lawful cares employ us ; That they steal away our Hearts, and take possession ; debase our Minds, and fasten them down to the Earth, devour our time and strength, and leave us no Leisure, no Inclination, to follow that which is the great End of Living, the Glory of God, and the Salvation of our Souls. They harden us against the *Calls* of Grace, and indulge and feed those very Lusts, which we are bound to kill and crucify. And therefore, since when God permits the One sort of these cares, he does not absolve us from the Other ; Since he ap-
points

points us to Another State, and hath given us a double Care ; to provide for our living hereafter, as well as here, but chiefly to provide how we may live hereafter ; And, since that future Life is to be sought, by fervent Devotion, by constant Watchfulness, by painful Labour of the mind, by many repeated Acts of Self-denial and Mortification ; Since Vertue and Happiness are not to be attained in an instant, but must be the fruit of a long Course and continual Endeavours ; Since the Rewards of these are so much more precious and desirable, and the Rest at our Journeys end so much more comfortable, than any Conveniences we can possibly meet with by the Way ; It follows, that these Conveniences must be used and sought, but as Refreshments only, as things given to support and entertain us in our Travels. But if we be diverted by These, and set up our rest on this side the *Land of Promise*, The End of all will be to perish in our folly ; And when, instead of thanking Him by our Obedience, who gives us these Encouragements, we grow fond of Them, and despise Him ; What can we think all this will come to

to at last, but that God should be Just, and such men Miserable? That he revenge this baseness of Wretches so insensible of their own true happiness, so unthankful for his gracious Condescensions in their favour. In a word, that the foolish Worldling, who rather chose to feed on Husks with Swine, should be shut out as unworthy to eat Bread *in the Kingdom of his Heavenly Father.*

II. *From the Justice of God in condemning, Wretches so unperswadeable to their own Advantage,* I pass now, in the Second place, *To consider his Mercy in the means used for the Conversion of those, who do thankfully accept and profit under them.* And This, as it is illustrated throughout the whole Parable, so particularly in the twenty third Verse now before us, *The Lord said unto the Servant, Go out into the Highways and Hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.* That even the *Jews* should find so much favour was wonderfully kind, but of That large Intimations and Promises had been given in the Old Testament. But that the *Gentiles* should be admitted, who were under the same formal Cove-

Covenant with God ; That the *Blind* and the *Lame*, the Wanderers and Stragglers should be so earnestly invited, so gladly received, this is a most surprising, a most unspeakable Condescension. It was so in the first Establishment of the Gospel, it is so in the constant ministration of it still. For, even in Christian Countries, there want not instances too many, of Men, whose Spiritual Infirmities render them as distressed, as despicable in that Capacity, as their Outward and Bodily ones do those wretched Objects, that lie at our Doors, and in our Streets. The Ignorant and the Irresolute, the Men of Weak Reason and Strong Passions, These are the *blind*, and the *halt*, and the *maimed* ; And They who live wild, and submit to no Rule, no Order, are as properly the *Highways* and *Hedges*, as the darkest and most barbarous Nations heretofore. Yet even these our God does not despise, but gathers them up and feeds them, when they are duly sensible of their Misery, humble and poor in Spirit, and sadly sorry for their Imperfections. Thus, while They, whose Hearts and Circumstances are at Ease, grow insolent,

lent, and disdain his Mercy, and these conceited rich are sent empty away ; The hungry Soul feeds, and fills it self with good things. The Persons then, to whom such favour is shewn, make it the more remarkable ; Especially when so much Industry is used upon their account as this whole Parable reflects ; And We, if we reflect upon the wise methods of God, may find.

Now this care I speak of, was seen heretofore, in the many repeated Messages and Calls to *Knowledge and Repentance* ; In God's being found of those that sought him not, and manifesting himself to Them, who neither were, nor cared to be, acquainted with him. But chiefly in sending that Eminent Servant, *Him in whom his Soul delighted*, Him, *who took upon him the form of a Servant*, and stoop'd to all the meannesses and sufferings of Afflicted flesh, to collect these miserable and impotent Creatures into his House, and unite these Vagabonds into one Family. Nor does there want great and wise Variety of Means to reduce lame and infirm Christians still ; tho' neither the Case, nor the manner of the Remedy now, do either require, or admit,

admit, an exact Parallel. The receiving Men early into Christ's Fold, and preventing the Powers of Hell, and Misfortunes of Error, by the timely Sanctifications of Baptism, and Securities of being Educated in the Truth; The daily Administration of the Word and Sacraments, which are so many *Calls* loudly sounding in our Ears; The Inward Influences of the Divine Grace, driving those *Calls* home, and making them enter deep, and work Effectually; These are standing Methods; and with These Applications all Ingenuous Tempers will be won. But if Some prove Refractory and Disobedient, God does not give them over even so. For then is the Season of *compelling them to come in*, that is, Of betaking himself to some more sharp, and powerful, and awakening methods; Such as shall in a manner force and drive them to better Consideration, such as there is no standing out against, but will work upon Men's minds, almost whether they will or no. Of this kind are those Seasonable Pains, or Fits of Sickness upon our Persons; Those Afflictions in our Estates, Those Losses of our Relations, The Asper-

Aspersions upon our good Names, by which the Stubborn themselves are bound to discipline, the Proud are humbled, the Careless are roused into Thought, and the Bold daring Sinner is affrighted into better manners. For the natural Effect of these things is to teach men Understanding, and the End of all Correction from our Heavenly Father, is to make the chastised parties **partakers of his holiness*; to reclaim them from those Offences that have deserved his Judgments, and to bring forth the wholesome and *profitable fruits* of Peace, and Patience, and Amendment.

* Hebr.
XII. 10.

Oh Blest constraint! Oh kind severity! Lord give us Grace, when this thy bitter Cup is held forth to us, not with Patience only, but even with Thanks to drink it; and wisely to consider, that what it wants in Relish, it makes up in Health and kindly Operation. Help us, not to bear only, but to kiss the Rod; and bless those sufferings that force us to be happy. Lord! when thy Gentler methods have been used to no effect, permit us not to perish for want of strong unpalatable remedies; but when we wander and grow wanton with prosperity, stop thou our
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wicked and unwary steps, pluck us back from the dangerous precipice, and let us not be utterly lost; but, by distresses and misfortunes sent for our Eternal welfare, bend our Head-strong Hearts, subdue and soften our rebellious Passions, and thus at least *compel us to come in.*

* *Commun.
Service.
Second Exhort.*

I shall take leave now to conclude this Argument concerning Mens neglect of Religion in general, by applying the Parable before us, as our excellent * Church hath done, (and as the common practice of many careless Christians gives but too just occasion for doing) to their making Business and Diversions an excuse, for not frequenting the Blessed Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in particular. This is a great and most necessary part of the Christian Institution; it is enforced by all those Reasons urged at large in the foregoing parts of this Discourse; But, because something may be observed with regard to it, more peculiar to the Dignity of the Mystery, and more accommodated to stir and warm our Affections, I would not content my self with referring you to those general Considerations only.

Consider

Consider then, my Brethren, that Your God and Saviour hath here prepared a noble and most delicious Feast. He spreads his Table, sends out his Servants and Inviters, and asks your Company to eat; to eat not only with him, but of him. Himself is here the Master, and himself is the Entertainment. The Fowls upon the Mountains, and the Beasts of the Field are all in his sight; yet were all these slain and served up, the Feast would not be so rich as now it is. For here the Soul is fed, and Heaven it self descends Mystically into every faithful Breast. The Lamb of God is kill'd and crucified: You see the Images of his Body bruised and broken, and the Blood streaming from his Wounded Side. And with these Elements of Bread and Wine each faithful Guest receives an inward Grace: Pardon & Peace, spiritual Strength and every benefit of his saving Passion. Hence 'tis these Elements are term'd the *Bread of Life*, the *Wine of Elect Souls*, and in a spiritual and efficacious sense, the *Flesh and Blood of Christ*, which nourishes and exhilarates the inward Man, and conveys into us a principle of living godlily, and living for ever.

And are you so stupid, to prefer the *Apples of Sodom*, and the *Grapes of Gomorrah*, before this Heavenly Banquet? Do the fading, the empty objects of the present time so wholly imploy you, that no leisure can be found for the Concerns of Eternity? Shall sinful Delights; nay, shall important Affairs draw you off? What is this, but to indulge your Bodies, or to feed your Families, while something, nearer to you than both these, is suffered to lye and perish for Hunger, without any seeming Concern?

But farther yet. Remember who it is that invites you. Your Father, your Friend, your King, your God. And is there no respect due to these Characters? It is your Christ that calls; he who hungered, and thirsted, and wept, and bled, and dy'd for you. He calls you to that health and happiness, which you could never have had, unless he had in mercy condescended to do and suffer all this for you.

He earnestly intreats you in this Sacrament to accept the pledges of his future, and the tokens of his past Love; to strengthen your Faith in the One, by these lively remembrances
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of the Other : And not refuse to be found by one, who hath taken so much pains to seek and to save you, when you were lost. How can you then so rudely, so unworthily absent your selves ? How unpardonable is this Coldness, this Refusal, this Contempt of so great a Mystery, and your own Mercy ? Is this a suitable return for so much Kindness ? And would you forgive your selves for using any Patron upon Earth so ungratefully ? But you want no inclination, if Business and troublesome Engagements would permit you to come. Alas ! vain Man ! Your *Fields and Yoke of Oxen*, the following your Employment, and providing for your Children will not discharge you from attending here. If these things ought to be done, yet the other ought least of all to be left undone. Nor hath God so ordered the matter, but that Both may very well be done, and each, in their due place, will be highly acceptable to him. But if our necessities were truly considered, this is the much more necessary. For hither we come to find Cure for our Sins, Food for our inward Strength, Comfort for our Sorrows, a Sanctified use of our

Enjoyments , a Blessing upon our honest Labours, and , which is more worth than all the rest, a Fore-tast of Heavenly Bliss, in peace of Conscience, pure Devotion, and an intimate Union with our dear Redeemer. These are the Benefits of worthy Communicating, and They who will consent to be thus happy here, shall by these means be happy for ever hereafter.

Do not then turn the deaf Ear to so kind, so advantagious offers ; nor let Gods empty Tables any more reproach you : Defraud not thus your Souls, whose dangerous Sickneſs is want of Appetite to this Spiritual Food. And that Inappetence is caused by too long abstinence. Frequent and devout approaches will quicken your desires, will heal your distempers, will refresh all your Languishings. And, believe me, it highly concerns you, to make up for past neglects, while you have time : For ſee theſe precious opportunities riſe up in Judgment, and draw on that Sentence of my Text, *That They who will not taſte this Supper here,* ſhall not be ſuffered to partake in Heaven, of That which this represents, even the Glorious Preſence of the King
of

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of Saints, the Company of Angels and Blessed Spirits, the everlasting Festival of the Faithful, and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb of God. Which Condemnation God give us all Grace to escape, *for the sake of that Lamb, the blessed Holy Jesus, who takes away the sin of the World, and to whom, with God the Father, and the Holy Ghost be all Honour and Glory for ever. Amen.*

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SERMON XII.

THE C A S E OF A Weak and Imperfect *F A I T H*.

St. Mark IX. 24. Latter part.

Lord I believe, help thou my Unbelief.

WHILE our Saviour was discovering his Glory to some of the Disciples, in his Transfiguration on the Mount; a Person, in grief for his Son, who was grievously vexed

vexed with a Devil, brings him to the remainder of those Disciples left behind, to have the evil Spirit dispossess. Providence in great Wisdom had so ordered the matter, that They were not able to effect this Cure, which gave occasion to the Scribes to attack them; And in the Heat of that Dispute our Saviour returns, * to inquire into the Cause of their Controversy; † and is answered by the Party concerned, that he had made Tryal of the Disciples in Vain; which gave him some distrust of their Master too. For so it is manifest it had, by that doubtful form, in which he begs his assistance, (V. 22.) *But if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.* Our Saviour hereupon gives him to understand, that even the Power of working Miracles was under some confinements; and not to be exerted, except in favour of such Persons as met it with a ready Faith: But where it found Men duly qualify'd, nothing was or should be wanting on God's part; *Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth,* (V. 23.) The Father of the Child, full of concern for his Son, sadly sensible of his
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* Ver. 1. to

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† Ver. 16.

own Defects, and desirous of greater perfection, replies with a very moving earnestness, and an over-flowing of Tears, *Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief.*

This manner of Address plainly speaks the State of the Man's Mind, and shews he wanted a full and absolute perswasion, and such an entire confidence in the Power and Goodness of Christ, as he wished and ought to have had : Nay such as we find several instances of, in the History of our Saviour's Life and Actions. But, though he had not all Faith, yet it seems he had Enough for his purpose. He did not come up to the highest, and foremost Rank; but he was accepted, and thought worthy of Compassion, though not of Commendation. Accordingly the following Verses declare the success of this imperfect condition of Soul; for our Lord commanded the dumb and deaf Spirit, and wrought the Cure, though with some pain and difficulty to the Patient. A difficulty which seems to have born proportion to the Father's Faith; For *the Spirit cried and rent him sore, and he was as one dead.* But however, the Command was too mighty to be disobey'd, for *the Spirit came out of him,*

* Ver. 26.

him, and as St. Matthew adds, in his relation of this Passage, *the Child was cured from that very Hour..*

My design from hence is to apply this instance at large, by enquiring into the nature of a Weak and Imperfect Faith, and that chiefly for these two Reasons.

First, For the Humiliation of those who imagine themselves more perfect than really they are.

And *Secondly*, for the Comfort of Them, who are in reality Better men than they imagine themselves to be. And I do not doubt, before I have done, but to convince the most exalted Christian, that though he may truly say, with this person in my Text, *Lord I believe*; yet there is need enough still of joyning in the latter part of the Verse, and of praying as he did, *Lord help my Unbelief*. And I hope too, that what I shall say will be able to support the honest and the feeble-minded Christians, that though they are sadly sensible of *some remains of Unbelief* in their Souls, which need to be helped; yet the Case is not so bad with them neither, but that they may without Vanity make

that Profession, in the beginning of my Text, and say very truly, *Lord I believe.*

This is my intention ; but the nature of the Subject will not so well bear to have the Argument branched out to these Two different sorts of Persons distinctly. For the same Reasons, which prove that No man arrives at an absolute Perfection in Faith, do likewise prove, That No man ought to despair, because he discovers some Imperfections of Faith in himself. Since at that rate Every ones Circumstances would be desperate ; and there could be no such thing as a worthy and true Believer in the World. I must therefore content my self with handling this matter in the General ; and that, which seems to me at present the best method for doing it effectually, is to insist on these Three Heads.

I. First, *To assign some reasons for the weakness of mens Faith.* And these shall be such, as every one of us will find himself more or less concerned in.

II. Secondly, *To shew, that those things which Many People are apt to suspect*

spect as signs of Unbelief, or that they have not True Faith, are not in reality any such Signs. And

III. Thirdly, *To lay down some Rules, whereby the weakness of Faith may be distinguish'd from the Want of it. And here I will shew how any man, by examining his own Conscience carefully, may discern whether his Belief be consistent with the Terms of Salvation, or not.*

I begin with the 1st, And here by Faith I understand not only (1.) The Assent of the mind to those Truths which God hath revealed, in obedience to his Command, and dependence on his Truth and Goodness; Nor barely (2.) An outward and express'd Profession of all such Articles, are necessary to be acknowledged in order to make us Christians; but also (3.) Such a vigorous and lively Assent, as may prevail upon men to enter into Covenant with God, and may influence their Hearts and Practice powerfully, such as may put us upon the performance of our Duty, and the making good those Engagements in the whole Course of our Lives, which we bring upon ourselves, when we thus enter into

Covenant with God. For All This is comprehended under *Believing* ; and several accounts may be given of our failing in sundry instances of this Faith. Particularly These that follow.

i. As *First*, One reason of this may be taken from the very *Nature of those things, which we are commanded to believe*. For Some of these being very dark and mysterious Truths, it cannot be expected, that our Minds should adhere to them, with the same sort of Assurance, that they are used to do, in such Other matters as fall within our Comprehension, and of which we have a clearer and more distinct knowledge. The Attributes and Excellencies of God ; the Trinity of Persons in the Divine Nature ; an Eternal State of Bliss or Woe hereafter ; and the Restoring to us these fleshly Bodies again at the General Resurrection, (notwithstanding the infinite and unconceivable Changes which Time and Corruption bring upon them in the mean while) These, and some Others of the like nature are of the first Principles of Christianity ; the Prime and most necessary Truths to be entertained, and firmly embraced.

embraced. But it is manifest withal, that These are matters, of which one cannot have any just and adequate Notions : Because they are not commensurate to the Capacities of mortal men. The largest mind is too narrow to receive them ; the most penetrating Wit cannot sound all their depths ; nor the most indefatigable Study conquer all the difficulties that may be charged upon them. And therefore, since Men's Assent is always governed by their Apprehensions, the Mind will never find the same Evidence for those things that are far above out of our sight, that it does for Others, which we see, and feel, and daily converse with ; Such as are of the same level with our selves, and we are able to give a tolerable good account of, by our own serious Thought, and nice Enquiry into the Nature of them.

I do not mean by this, that we have not Sufficient Motives for our Belief, even of those Truths, which we are least able to comprehend. For, when we are once perswaded of the Being of a God ; and convinced, that these are His Revelations ; nothing can be more equitable, than to submit our own
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Reasoning to his Declarations. This single Reflection, that infinite Wisdom cannot be mistaken, that Infinite Goodness cannot lead others into mistakes, nor perfect Truth lye, is a foundation strong enough to Build the firmest Faith upon. But still the urging of this Reflection upon our selves must be the work of much application. And, though we are exceedingly to blame, if any Objections, which the Obscurity of those Great Important Doctrins is wont to raise in us, be suffered to overthrow our Faith, or dangerously to shake it; yet such is the nature of our minds, that where Sense or Demonstration do not represent things to us plainly, and beyond all Contradiction, there Scruples and Cavils will now and then arise; and the Devil will not fail to make use of these Occasions, and try by them to loosen and dissettle us, from that firmness of perswasion, which is due to such a Revelation. Even They, who struggle most successfully against such attempts of his, may yet sometimes find a tendency to doubt, or some little disturbance from them.

But those men will be sure to find a very great deal, who, over-looking the Credibility

dibility of the Testimony and Revelation it self, which is Reason's proper Province in these matters ; they expect their satisfaction from the sight and knowledge of the things Revealed. Which is in effect to put their Enquiry upon a wrong Scent, to require an Evidence, of which the Condition of this Subject is not capable, and to destroy the very Essence of Faith : which in strict speaking could not be *Faith*, if it were not the *Evidence of things unseen*.

Now, if such be the Condition of our Faith, with regard to the very *first* Act ; That of *Assenting to the Truths revealed by God* : We shall find the Difficulties grow upon us in the following parts of it, when it comes to influence our Practice, and to govern our Affections. And this will appear very evidently, if we consider

(2.) *Secondly*, After what manner it is, that the Belief of these Truths come to gain a power over our Wills, and to command our Actions. One would think, that, to be once thoroughly convinced of the Truth of Christianity, and the Reasonableness and Excellency

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cellency of the Duties it enjoins, were enough to fix a Man all his Life long. And perhaps, in matters of mere Speculation it is so. After any point hath been duly considered, and all the Arguments for and against it have been put into the Balance together; That side which preponderates will take possession of the Understanding. And, if the advantage be visible and great, there will be no probable danger of having this undone again, or being drawn off to a contrary Opinion. But where we are not to rest in a bare Judgment, of a thing's being *thus*, or *otherwise*; Where we are obliged to pursue a Doctrine thro' all its Consequences, and to make it a Rule of Living to us; Where we must not only believe that so it is, but upon all occasions behave our selves like Men seriously possess'd with that belief; there the Case is very different. And from hence it is, that no present perswasion, though never so full and clear, will answer the Character of a Christian Faith, without a particular and constant Application. And in this it seems to be chiefly, that the generality of Christians fail: And great difficulties there are, both in reducing
General

General acknowledged Truths to our own Particular Circumstances ; and in having the Applications always ready and at hand, when our occasions call for them.

This is manifestly seen in the very first principle of all Religion, *The Belief of a God and Providence.* For the acknowledgment of such a Being infers a Power constantly superintending the Affairs of the whole World ; Ever present with us ; A strict Observer, and an impartial Judge of all our Actions ; A Lover of Holiness and Justice, and a mighty Avenger of his Honour ; when we provoke him. These are all of them Notions, which either Nature, or Religion, or Both, have riveted so fast into men's Minds, that we find very Few of those who strive against them, and would fain get quit of them, able to do it effectually.

And yet of the Men who profess to have these Apprehensions, how few are there, that take a due care to drive them home, upon their Consciences, and improve them to all the mighty purposes, which they are fitted to serve ? Nay ; How often do even They, who revolve them frequently, and

make it their business to dwell and converse with their Lord; How often, I say, do They, the Best, the most Reverent Adorers of the Godhead, betray their want of Consideration, and fall, by Surprise or Forgetfulness, if not by Wilfulness and Presumption? Now the failings of most People in this Case, cannot proceed from Infidelity, or want of Faith, properly so called; for they do most firmly believe the Justice, and Providence of God; And are able, perhaps, in cold Blood, to convince the sturdiest Gainsayer, and to warm the coldest and most frozen Neglector of Religion.

But the business is, that their thoughts are not always equally bent, nor the Applications of these general Doctrines at all times made to their own private Circumstances; Or even those Applications are not ever powerful alike: And, because the *shewing our Faith by our Works*, is a duty of continual practice and use; and not One single Act of Perswasion and Assent, though never so stedfast; Therefore every one, in this respect, is more or less defective, as he is wanting in the ready performance of each Act. And even those,
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who would be ready to dye at a stake for the Truth of Christianity, yet cannot always preserve their Minds so thoroughly awake, nor find the Impressions of these things so lively and vigorous, as to prevent, in their lives, Every thing that is not perfectly consistent with such a Belief. The Habit of Faith is in their Souls; and in Many, perhaps in Most Occasions, exerts itself with great efficacy, and success. But it is their misfortune, that the Cares of the World, The Clutter of business, The Diversions of Life, Their own Inadvertency, or some other accidental Unhappiness, jostle the more necessary Meditations aside for a while, and so that Habit lies dormant and idle. It will probably recover and rouse it self very quickly, but, till that be done, it is the same thing, (as to that particular instant of action) as if the man had had no such *Ideas* at all.

3. But *Thirdly*, There is yet another Account to be given of Men's weakness of Faith, in which all of us are deeply; All (God knows) but too deeply concerned, I mean the Infirmities of Humane Nature, with regard

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to the prevalency of our carnal Lusts, and the Affection we bear to this present World. The former Particular shew'd us a defect owing to want of Consideration; but This goes farther, & discovers a failing even in Consideration it self. When we pretend to judge, and yet determine wrong; When we do remember our Duty, & think upon it, but think and remember without Success. And This is a failing of so much the more fatal consequence, because Persons of higher Perfection are Subject to it. For, that the Heedless and Heady should stumble and fall, can be no strange thing to us, But when the Cautious and Circumspect, They who are sensible of the Slippery way, and see their danger, and intend to avoid the Precipice, do yet slide into it; This must in all reason make us very apprehensive, and will warrant no Man in any vain supposals of absolute Security and Perfection.

The Powers of Reason and Religion are given us, to check and controul the extravagance of our Desires; to calm and quiet our Passions; to comfort and sustain us in all our Disorders and Misfortunes. And indeed, if applied seasonably and impartially, they

they are sufficient for this great Work ; An excellent Remedy for all our Diseases, and a sure Support under the heaviest Calamities of humane Life. But yet this Remedy does not always prove effectual ; because we do many times fail in the Use of it , and will not allow it to have its full force, and just operation upon our Hearts, but incline too much to the Objects of sense, and are carried away by too tender a Concern for the things of this present World.

We know well enough, that the Happiness of a Christian is not placed here below : And, when the precious Promises of the Gospel are duly considered ; when a Life of Eternity, and uninterrupted Bliss is put into the Balance, against One, which we are sure can be but short, and find to be uneasy and vexatious at the best ; We cannot but be satisfied, that the Apostle had reason, in advising Men, by His Example, to look not at ** the things which* * 2 Cor. IV. 18. *are seen and are temporal, but at the things that are not seen, because they are Eternal.* And yet, when we have imprest this Truth pretty well, (as we think) upon our Souls ; it frequently,

either forsakes us quite, when we come to the Encounter; or proves too feeble, when we have most occasion for it. The Byass of Sense draws us from our strait Course; Some trifling Advantage, some pleasing Gratification presents it self; and, though we pretend to argue, and debate the matter, yet it is too frequently but like a Corrupt Judge; All Arguments against inclination are lessened to the view; The Bribery upon our affections is too tempting to be withstood; and we prevail with our selves against Duty and sober Consideration, to swallow the Bait, though at the same time we cannot but know, that there is Death upon the Hook. This is the Case of those infinite Offences, which are not early reflected upon with Remorse, when past; but are even committed with Reluctancy, at the very moment of Compliance. And the great Cause, why our After-remembrances of these things are so bitter to us, is, that then the Charm is at an End. We behold the Sin as it really is, and view it coolly; Expectation had magnified it to our Eye before; And we saw every thing double,

ble, while drunk with Desire and Passion. But now that Disguise is off, we have recovered our Senses; and the thing is returned to its true proportions again. And thus we know, and perceive the Better, and yet choose and pursue the Worse: And the Conflict St. Paul seems to describe in the Unregenerate Person, happens sometimes to be the Infelicity of a very good one, for the main: * *The good that I would I do not, but the evil that I would not, that I do. For I delight in the Law of God after the inward Man: But I see another Law in my Members, warring against the Law of my Mind; and bringing me into Captivity to the Law of sin that is in my Members.*

* Romans
VIII.v.19.
22,23.

The Condition is much the same with our Griefs, and our Fears, and our Troubles; as it is with our Pleasures, and Desires. For, when we see a Friend in Poverty or Affliction, How many are there, that can address themselves to his Circumstances with great Dexterity and Strength of Reason? Tell him, that he must consider himself always under the disposal of a Wise, and Just, and Kind Providence, that *does not afflict willingly, nor*
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* Romans
VIII. 28.

† 2 Cor.
IV. 17.

take any *delight* in *grieving the Children of Men*, but makes these very Chastisements a mark of Fatherly Tenderness, and Love, and never proceeds to use Severity, but for excellent purposes, and to our mighty Advantage: *That All things will be sure to work together * for Good to them that Love and Fear God*, and continue stedfast in their Duty; And that the † *light sufferings* of a *moment*, if meekly submitted to, and wisely improved, will work out a *far more exceeding and Eternal weight of Glory*. These, and such like Consolations are frequently inculcated with great Sincerity and Zeal. We utter them, not formally, and as Words of Course, but as the real Sense of our own Souls. We wonder to see so small effect of them; and are apt perhaps to make invidious Comparisons between our Selves and Others; as being fully perswaded, that these Considerations would not fail to soften any Accident, and compose Our Minds under the severest Tryals, that our Patience could possibly be called to. But alas! Providence often undeceives us in this vain Opinion. For, if the like Misfortunes come to touch Us too,

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all our former Wonder and Contempt ceases, and we presently find our selves *to be but Men*. When a devouring Fire hath consumed our Substance in a Moment, or the Anguish of Pain, and Bodily Diseases, cast us upon Beds of Languishing and Sorrow; Or if the Desire of our Eyes be taken from us with a stroke; a tender Wife, a darling Child, or a Friend that is even as our own Soul, snatched out of our Arms; Nature then gets uppermost, and Passion makes head: We soon find a vast difference between talking like Philosophers, and acting like them; and seem to take it ill, that our Friends should think we ought to admit of such cold Comforts, or put our grief under such Restraints, as we condemned others for neglecting, in the very same, or perhaps (if truly considered) in a more deplorable Case before, than Ours is now: I say, *if truly considered*, Because in all these Cases the Fallacy of *Self* leads us into gross mistakes, and is the only ground of all this change in us. For every Man is so partial, or so cruel to himself, as to fancy or find out some peculiar aggravations in his Own Misfortunes, which

which those of No other Persons in the World besides, (he thinks) are, or can be attended with. And All this for no manner of Reason, but because These are his Own, and Those are other Peoples. 'Tis the having no concern nor Interest in them, that shews him the Disasters of his Neighbours in a just light, and leaves his Mind free and undisturbed, to discern the suitableness of proper comforts to them. But in those that come home to himself, Interest, and Passion, and Self-Love turn the Glass, and shew him every thing through false Opticks. The Affliction swells to a monstrous bulk, and the Comforts dwindle away to nothing; till the black Cloud and Tempest be a little laid within; and the Man restored to Temper, and the power of thinking by Degrees.

Religion and Prudence do indeed assist Men wonderfully, in giving Law to their Passions, restraining their Excesses, and preserving them from all such furious Heats, as are impious and indecent. But they do not extinguish Humane Nature, nor prevent many sudden Sallies, which a good Man in his soberer thoughts may see
reason

reason enough to condemn in himself.

It is * *Faith* indeed, which *overcometh* * 1 John
the World; and *This is the only Victory* V. 4.
we can obtain over it. But it is very
well, if we gain the Field at last,
though after many fruitless Attempts,
and with some Loss. For, while we
continue to live in these Bodies, They,
and their Concerns, will affect us very
tenderly; We must be content, not on-
ly to act in them, but by them, and
with them; nay, and to be acted upon
by them too. And, unless Good men
could wholly put off this load of
Flesh, and refine themselves into Spi-
rit, That will be dragging down the
Soul, and tainting it, in some mea-
sure, with its Affections. And Good men
must either cease to be Men, or it will
never be otherwise with them.

Thus far then we have advanced in
the design I at first propounded; that
These Reasons, assigned for the
weakness of Faith, concern Every Man;
As being founded partly in the Nature
of Religion, and partly in the Consti-
tution of Mankind. And therefore,
Since no Man's Understanding is so ex-
alted, but that the Mysteries of Chri-
stianity

stianity will still be too high, and too vast for him to take a full view of; Since the Mind will not bear to be continually intent, and least of all upon Spiritual and Divine Subjects, and even the most vigilant Man must have his Seasons of slumbring; Since, *Lastly*, The Corruptions of Sense, and the Violences of Passion, and the Fondness for the World, will ever carry some sway in a Creature, compounded of Body, as well as Soul; Since Sensual Allurements will entice sometimes, and outward Distresses sometimes ruffle and distemper the best disposed Minds; The Defects of Faith in us all are but too manifest; and the most stedfast Believer, does not disparage his Virtue, or injure his own Merit; if, to that profession of the Person in my Text, *Lord I believe*, he condescend to add his Prayer too, and say, *Lord help my unbelief*.

II. The other part of my Undertaking is to satisfy the Persons dejected in Spirit, beyond what there is just occasion for; Such as, because they with grief discover some failing and weakness of Faith, are apt presently

sently to suspect that it is wholly wanting, and imagine it would be a presumption, in such as they are, to say *Lord I believe.*

And in that Subject too we have gained this Advantage too by what hath been said already, That it is not every sort of Doubting or Dispute with a Man's self about the Principles of Religion; Not every Slip and false Step made through Surprise, or Forgetfulness, or Inconsideration, Not every compliance with a Temptation, nor every Regret and Disorder upon the Account of Afflictions, when they are sent upon us; that must go for an Argument of our being in a State of Infidelity. Some Instances indeed there may be under each of these kinds, that greatly endanger a Man's Salvation, and are just matter of Discomfort to him; But others are such, as he may lye under, and yet his Soul be still in a very safe and good Condition. But the distinguishing between these more precisely, and directing how to judge of our selves and Them, you must wait for a little longer; That being reserved

ved for the Business of my *Third* particular.

In the mean while I observe, that nothing is more plain in Scripture, than these two Truths, (1.) That several Men may have True Faith, and each of them have it in different proportions: And also, (2.) That One and the Same Man may believe truly, and yet believe at one time more steadfastly than at another. Which observations are both of them True in all the Cases, and the several instances of Faith before-mentioned; Whether we respect it only as an *Assent* of the Mind, or whether as a Principle of Virtue, and well-doing, I will explain my self by some Passages to be met with in the New Testament.

* Joh. IV.
v. 39. 41,
42.

* The Men of *Samaria* in the *Fourth* of St. *John*, believed our Saviour upon the Report of the Woman, that came from him; but they believed him yet more, when They heard his own Words. † The Ruler, in the close of that Chapter, believed, when our Lord said unto him, *Thy Son liveth*; But when he returned Home, upon comparing the time of his

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† John IV.
v. 50. 53.

son's Recovery, with that of our Lord's declaring it, he found an exact agreement between his words and the Event; Which was a great Addition, and a fresh Confirmation to his Faith.

* The Disciples beg of our Lord, *that* ^{* Luke XVII. v. 5, 6.} *he would increase their Faith*, which he resembles to a grain of Mustard-seed; and, though the growth of this be so prodigious, that from the least of Seeds, it spreads into a large Tree, yet still it is Faith, when it is but as a single Grain. Christ applies to himself, and to his gracious dealings with Weak Men, that Prophecy, of *not* ^{† Mat. XII. v. 20.} *breaking the bruised Reed, nor quenching the smoking Flax*, and thereby plainly intimates, that the Reed is still such though bruised, and that there is real fire in the flax, though it do not flame out in so bright a Zeal as that of Others, or as it self hereafter will do. || St. Peter commands, that we ^{|| 2 Pet. i. v. 3.} *add to our Faith Virtue, and to Virtue Temperance*; and so on; And the more of these we add, the nobler our Faith is; But still Faith it is, tho' we have not yet ascended all that Scale of Heavenly Graces. And thus in reason we must conclude it to be. For Faith is a

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Habit of the Mind, and, as such, it must needs admit of Degrees, and is capable of being greater or less, without changing its Nature, or ceasing to be Faith. The growth of the Soul is like that of the Body, gentle and slow, owing to long time, and much nourishment, and repeated exercise; So that, As the Humane Nature is the same in a Child of a Span long, tho' in less proportions then, as to every part of it; Faith is likewise the same in those whom the Scripture calls

1 Pet. II. 2. *Babes in Christ*; But stronger indeed in them that *grow up to the fulness of the Stature, of perfect men* in him.

Eph. IV. 13.

This is so evident to Reason and Experience, that I should think it needless to insist any longer on my Second Head, were it not, that many well-meaning Persons are used to disquiet themselves with some very troublesome Scruples concerning this Matter. Some of the Chief whereof I shall therefore set my self to consider; and, if I can, to silence and satisfy them, in my next Discourse.

SERMON XIII.

THE CASE OF A

Weak and Imperfect *F A I T H*.

The Scruples about it consider'd.

St. Mark IX. 24. Latter part.

Lord I believe, help thou my Unbelief.

THE Method in which I proposed to treat of these Words, for the Humiliation of Men better in their own Opinion, than really they

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are;

are ; and the Comfort of Others in reality, better than they think themselves to be ; you may remember, was This:

First, To assign some Reasons for the Weakness and Imperfection of Faith ; and These, such as every Man will find himself more or less concerned in.

Secondly, To shew, That those things which many people are apt to suspect in themselves, as Signs of Unbelief, or that they have no true Faith, are not in reality any such Signs.

Thirdly, To lay down some Rules, whereby the Want of true Faith may be distinguished from the Weakness of it ; And how any Person, by examining his own Conscience, may discern, whether his Belief be consistent with the Terms of Salvation or not.

The *First* of these Heads hath been already dispatched ; and some progress made in the *Second* ; So far, as to shew, that Faith, like all other Graces, admits of several degrees, and that the Imperfection is no sure proof of the total and absolute Want of it.

But now, because Many People of honest Desires, and sincere Inclinations
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to Godliness, are sometimes involved in many uncomfortable Scruples upon this occasion, I promised farther to consider some of the principal Doubts, which used to give such Men trouble. And to that I now proceed.

These Discomforts, (so far as I have had occasion to observe them) usually arise, either (1.) From some Failings which Men feel or fancy in themselves, or (2.) From the Want of such easy and peaceful Resentments of Mind, as true Faith, and a Piety which God accepts, is always supposed to produce. I shall briefly consider each of these sorts, so far as is necessary to do it.

First, As to the Failings Men find or fancy in themselves, they are commonly such as these; *The falling now and then into some grievous Sin; The seeming decay of Grace*, and this is gathered from their not perceiving themselves to grow in it. *Their being not always so well disposed to Religious Duties, or so zealous in the performance of them, as they used and ought to be; Not Sorrowing enough for past Offences; Or coming short of*

some Virtues which they would fain attain to. I think These are either the chief Objections, that Men use to urge against themselves; Or at least, that the Rest may easily be reduced within this compass, and will admit of the same Answers with these. In which I shall not need to enlarge very much, because what I have already discoursed concerning the general Causes of Weakness of Faith; and the Reality even of that Faith which is but Weak, does in a great measure contain the Substance of what is requisite to be said upon these several occasions.

Now *First*, The *falling back into old sins*, is indeed a very sad Consideration, and so much the more so, as those falls are more frequent, and the Sins into which we fall are more heinous. But, when we have remembered withal, that the most vigilant mind is not always awake; that the Impressions of Faith, and Zeal for Religion, are not always enforced to the utmost, nor will the Nature of Man bear perpetual Application, and intense Thought; Though this unhappiness may well be allowed to create us some

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dissatisfaction, yet is it not of so evil Consequence, as to minister any just occasion of Distrust, or absolute Despair. For still we have this Consideration to support us, That the great Judge of all the Earth will not fail to do Right ; *that*, when He brings us to Account, all fair and reasonable Allowances will be made, both for the weak and blind sides of the Nature he hath given us, the surprises and sudden Accidents which prevail upon our impotence , and ensnare us before we have leisure to make head against them ; the Intanglements of the World, and the vast variety of Temptations, that hem us in ; and the strength of sensual Appetite, which wearies out the Soul, in our continual struggles with it. These are such misfortunes as every Man's Condition lays him open to : And from hence it comes to pass, that the Virtue even of the most perfect is not without its Blemishes ; That Repentance is the constant Business of Life ; For, though a total change should be made once for all ; yet They, who purpose most, and prosecute their good Intentions best, will every day discover something that had better not have been

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done, or at least something that might have been done better. Something that either needs to be corrected, or is capable of being improved. And indeed the most cautious walker with God does not always order his goings, not only so, as to prevent false Steps, and small Errors; but now and then wanders very far, and stumbles, and falls very dangerously.

To this very purpose is it, that (our Bl. Saviour excepted, who was God as well as Man) the Holy Scripture hath nowhere proposed any Person whatever, as an eminent pattern of Virtue, without taking particular notice of some very remarkable Fault or other in that Man's Conversation. And surely the Anger and Impatience of *Moses*, the Adultery and Murder committed by *David*, and the Denial of Christ by *St. Peter*, were not only intended to humble those, who are so far transported with an Opinion of their own Excellencies, as to think they cannot fall; But also to raise and strengthen them that do fall: For these prove, that there is a wide difference between a Mans doing things things unworthy of Religion, and wholly abandoning all the

the Principles of it : Between forgetting God for a Season, and totally denying or departing from him altogether ; And, that He is often provoked to be very angry with those, whom yet he sees fit to Compassionate, and not cast off utterly.

The plain Truth of this Matter is ; Humane Nature stands upon so slippery Ground, is thrust at so sore, and so fatally prone to strike in with the Enemies and Temptations that seek its Ruine, that it may well exercise our wonder, how Men preserve themselves so often, and recover so successfully ; but, that the Best should sometimes fall, and need such Recoveries, cannot to any considering Man appear strange at all. Again,

Secondly, Some there are, who, though they cannot accuse themselves of any notorious Relapses, (such as those we last mentioned) yet question the truth of their Faith, because *they do not perceive themselves to grow in it, nor do they find their Souls at all times so well disposed to the Duties of Religion, or so zealous in the performance of them, as they desire and ought to be ;* and therefore
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what they see stand still, or at least imagine to do so, they conclude goes backward: That the Fruits of the Spirit are blasted, which do not apparently thrive, and approach to visible maturity: And that their Graces are quite extinct, because they do not always burn bright; and shine out with a clear flame.

Now in Answer to any dissatisfactions of this kind, we are to consider, that These are very false measures to take an Estimate of our selves by; and that our Graces are not always to be judged according to their visible increase; And that for these Two very good Reasons, *First, Because such Increases are not always necessary to our Safety; And then Secondly, Because indeed they are not always visible to us, even when they are actually made.*

I. *First, I say such Increases are not always necessary to our Safety.* In the Products of Nature, we know, there is a set proportion, beyond which, if any thing grow, All afterwards is exorbitant and rather Excrescence, and Deformity, than any just Perfection. This indeed cannot be said in the case
of

of our Souls ; for no man can be too
Virtuous , or too excellently Good.
But then it is as true, That the same
pitch of Spiritual Strength and Grace,
is no more requisite to make all Per-
sons true Christians, and true Belie-
vers ; than the same Tallness of Stature,
and Largeness of Limbs are required in
every one to make him a true Man.
And therefore, when our Saviour pro-
mises his assistance, it is only thus ,
that *his* * *Grace shall be sufficient for us*, *₂ Cor.
That is, we shall have all necessary ^{XII. 9.}
Supplies. But it is very certain, that
the Necessities of Men differ, according
to their several Circumstances and Ca-
pacities in the World, and as These
change, so their occasions change al-
so. Now from hence it will follow,
both, that what is sufficient for One
Man, is not so for Another ; And
likewise, that what is sufficient for the
same Person at One time, may not An-
swer his Exigencies, nor suffice for his
purpose at Another time. In a Post
of Eminence, and Authority , where
a Man's Office obliges him to instruct,
or govern others , a larger share of
Wisdom, and Prudence, and Piety is
needful , to arm such a one against the
hazards

hazards of a Publick employment, and enable him to lead and to warn others, by becoming *a burning and shining Light* in his Generation, and inspiring his Charge by a pious Example.

And, even in the most private Station, as Temptations and Tryals assault a Man, so there is more pressing want of Faith; And of a greater steadiness and abundance still, the thicker those Darts of the Wicked are shot against us, and the more furious and fiery they are, which this Faith alone can quench. The Wisdom of Governours does not think the same preparations necessary in time of Peace, as when actually in a State of War; But provides against Surprises, and is content to defer the Arming, or drawing out their Forces, till Action calls for them. And thus it is sufficient, to be assured, that, upon great Emergencies, God's Strength shall be always ready at hand, and *made perfect in our weakness*, provided we be diligent and honest; that is, if we use the Strength we have, and do not indulge, nor industriously contribute to, our own Weakness. Let it be allowed then,
that

that a Man is not deceived in these Apprehensions of himself ; And, that his Faith do not make any considerable Advance ; yet if his Condition be such as does not call for any extraordinary Additions, the Case is still well enough. For, as no Man hath need to call his Health in question, who feels no indisposition of Body, though he do not perceive himself to grow every day stronger ; So, if our Faith be but a preservative from Lapses and Errors, and secure us against Spiritual Sickness and Death ; if we do not Languish and become manifestly cold and feeble in God's Service, nor find our Souls infected with Sin and Lust, This is a good Argument that our Spiritual Health is good. And, though a greater Degree, and higher perfections may be Desirable perhaps, yet still they are not Necessary, nor shall we perish for the want of them. Besides, where all these Blessings depend upon the mere Bounty and free Gift of our Master, we ought not to disquiet our selves with Reflections upon what we have not, but rejoyce and be thankful for what we have. It is enough, that we are admitted into his
Fa-

Favour, that he snatches us from Ruine, and allows us any place at all in his presence ; and will much better become us to sit down pleased, and take the lowest Room, than to discontent our selves, and lose the comfort of what we Enjoy, by repining that we are not taken *to sit on his right hand, and on his left, in his Kingdom.*

2. But then we are to consider in the next place, that *our Faith and other Graces do very often increase, and we in the mean while perceive it not.*

What our Church in one of her Articles teaches us to confess, is most certain, *That Good Works do naturally flow from Faith, so that by them a true Faith may be known, as evidently as a Tree by its Fruit.* The meaning whereof is this, that what we call *Faith*, if it produce no good Deeds, is no better than Dead, and none at all. But it is by no means a just Consequence from hence, that no Faith is lively and true, which is not perpetually exerting it self in New instances, any more, than that the Tree is Dead, which is not always Green, and always bearing. For our Souls have, in some sense, their Winters

Winters too, and the Seasons of sprouting again into Verdancy, and Fruitfulness. If therefore, either want of Opportunities to shew it self, keep it hid ; or the Storms of Affliction suppress, and put it back for a while ; we have no reason to be discouraged, or despair of its Life ; But may conclude, that, as the Corn lies covered, and yet gathers Strength when under Ground ; so this Faith may grow and flourish, and sit it self for great and glorious undertakings, even when we have no visible signs, nor sensible proofs of its doing so. And such indeed is the nature of all Habits whatsoever, whose Excellency consists, not in perpetual Action, but in a Readiness and masterly Disposition to act as becomes them, so often only, as proper occasions are offered to exercise them.

Nay farther yet, I add, that, though some things should appear to us, which look very suspicious, and seem to argue great Decays at least, if not absolute Deadness of Faith ; such as the being *sometimes indisposed to the Duties of Religion*, and feeling our Zeal less warm and vigorous than formerly,

merly, yet are not these Symptoms of so fatal Consequence, that we should conclude against the Reality of our Faith, or at all despair of our Spiritual Health and Safety from them.

Were the Soul indeed single by it self, and in a Condition to exert its own Powers, without any Lett or Contradiction, then we might expect, that it should be steddy and uniform in all its Operations. But here the Wise-Man's Observation takes place, That * *the corruptible body presseth down the Soul, and the Earthly tabernacle weigheth down the Mind, that museth upon many things*; or as the word might properly enough be render'd, *the mind encumbred with many cares*. And This in truth is Our Case. We are Subject to all the Necessities, and detain'd by all the Clogs and Hindrances, of a Body. Exposed to all the Trouble of supplying its Wants; and by that means, to all the Uncertainties, and all the Anxieties of the World; subject to all its Disorders and Infirmities; forced to act by, as well as with it, and so liable to be obstructed and diverted by its Passions and

* Wisd.

IX. 15.

πολυφρον-
τιδα.

and Pleasures, its Pains, and its Diseases. This is the very Reason, Not only why One Man differs so vastly from Another; but why the Same Man differs sometimes so strangely from Himself, that he scarce appears to be the Same. And, since the very same Affections are the Springs of our Actions and Resentments in Religious Matters, which are in all Other Affairs; it must needs follow, that, as those Springs are differently set, and we differently moved by them, the alterations we feel in point of Duty and Devotion, as they belong to the same Causes, so they will vary in like proportions, as in our common and worldly Concerns. So that, as we have differing Constitutions given us at first, or as any Accidents afterwards change those we have; it ought not to seem strange, much less to create us any great Trouble or Disquiet, if the Temper of our Minds, and our Dispositions to God and Goodness, shall happen to vary accordingly. The Cold and Phlegmatick will not find all those sprightly Emotions of Heart, as the Sanguine and Airy Man; Nor will This Man again feel the same Depth of Godly Sorrow

and sad Remorse, nor the like complacency in the Austerities and Mortifications of a penitent State, with one of a blacker and more heavy Blood. Thus Fear, and Love of God, and a stedfast Affiance in him, and Charity and Kindness to one another, though they be general Duties, such as All are obliged to, and may arrive at a competent Degree of ; yet All will not find it equally easy to practice them. But Those Persons will attain to the highest Perfections in these Virtues, and exercise them with less Difficulty, and a more sensible Delight, whom their own natural Complexions have most disposed toward Each of them. For Every one hath not the same Prone-ness in himself to fear, or to love, to trust, or to despond, to be good-natured, or to be sordid. And therefore, As the Work must needs be double, where Nature must be opposed and over-ruled ; so no doubt it is half done to our hands, where we are already possess'd with these happy Tendencies, when Inclination goes before, and directs us in our way to Duty.

Now

Now what Nature does once for all in forming our Constitutions at first, The Accidents of this Life, the Distempers of our Bodies, and a thousand other Occasional Things do for a time with us. That is, They give a present turn to our minds; and, while these Impressions last upon us, inspire our Souls with stronger inclinations and aversions than usual, and dispose or indispose us more, than, in our selves, and according to our general Temper, we are wont to be, toward them.

The Soberest and most Considerate Person cannot always preserve such an Evenness of Spirit, that no Provocation, no sudden Gusts of Anger, or Grief or some other Passion, should not sometimes render his Thoughts tumultuous and disorderly. Those that *seek the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness first*, yet must allow some part of their time and pains, in an honest search of the less important Conveniencies of this Life; And Business and Care, though they be so well guarded as not to disettle, yet they will in some measure divert the mind from the *One thing* necessary. A Man thus incumbered, cannot return

from the World to God all on the sudden, with the same fixed and sedate Composure of Mind, as if no other thoughts had mingled themselves with his Religious ones. But especially; The Soul and Body are linked together in so close a band, their operations upon one another reciprocally are so very quick and powerful, that it is scarce to be conceived, how strangely they labour under one anothers infirmities: And how great and speedy a change the Soul and all its affections feel, by every little Alteration that happens to the Body. How the Mind exults and enlarges it self, when This is in good health and temper; and again, how it languishes, and is cramped up under every indisposition, every accidental disturbance, that shakes the fleshly Tabernacle, in which it dwells. How Age and Sicknes do not only waste our Strength, and wither our Limbs, but enervate our Minds too, enfeeble all their Operations, and, as it were disjoynt all their Powers. How mighty a stroke all these things carry, and what Changes they make in us, Every one, who does at all consider, and look into himself, will quickly find,

None

None of us is able at all times alike to maintain the same Easiness of Humour, and Freedom in common Conversation. None is always equally qualified to think, or bend his mind to business; but even our Understandings have their Lucid, and their Clouded intervals. And if That part of our Mind, which hath least of all to do with the Body, be yet affected with the several Habits of it; How much more must those Others, (the Will, and the Desires) be subject to them, whose business lies chiefly with those Appetites and Inclinations, which Flesh and Sense converse with, and are moved by? How strongly must These determine us in Acts of Piety and Devotion particularly; and inspire Warmth, or chill us with Cold, when those Affections are the very part chiefly employed? All which is the more necessary to be observed, that Men may be set right in their judgments of themselves; and not rashly pronounce, as they frequently do, concerning the State of their Souls, and the hopes of Eternal Salvation, from such things as are not of a Spiritual Relation, but proceed merely from Natural and Necessary Causes. For

Thus in effect it is, that the *Incomes* and *Desertions* which Some people affect to talk of so much, and lay such mighty stress upon, are neither the *Graces*, nor the *Defects* of their mind, so much as the present *Habit* of the *Blood* and *Spirits*, and the particular *Temper* and *Constitution* of their *Bodies*.

III. The *Next* Objection seems to carry much more reason of *Dissatisfaction*, which is, when Men apprehend, that *they are not sufficiently sorry for their past Sins*. For This is a most necessary Duty; and He that does not sorrow enough, does it to very little purpose. But here again the whole *Difficulty* lies, in determining *what is Enough*. The misfortune of Persons in their *Doubts* concerning *Remorse* for sin is, that they mistake the *Nature* of *Sorrow* upon these *Occasions*. It is supposed by many, that this *Sorrow* does of it self recommend us to God, and is, for its own sake, exceeding acceptable to him; That herein chiefly consists the *Repentance* of a *Sinner*; As appears (they tell you) from the mournful *Complaints* of *David*, the bitter *Weeping* of *St. Peter*, and Other instances

instances of Holy Penitents in Scripture. All which are our Patterns, and, when we fall short of Their Anguish and Grief of Heart, it is to be feared, that we want Their Faith and Their Sincerity. And therefore it is urged, that no Man's Soul ought to speak comfort to him, without the like Humiliations, the like inward perplexities and groanings of Spirit, the like *watering our Couch with Tears*, and *making our Bed to swim in the Night-Season*.

Now all this is owing, as I said, to a wrong apprehension of this Godly Sorrow, and not distinguishing between the End it is to promote, and the Sorrow it self which is but as the Mean, and Way to that End. St. Paul hath taught us, ** that this worketh repentance not to be repented of*; But that which worketh Repentance, is plainly a part, or an Instrument, or a Cause of it only, but cannot be the Whole, nor the Perfection of the thing it works. Repentance is the Change of Heart and Life, the coming to a better Sense, and acting more wisely for the time to come. Where this is done effectually, God accepts the Person, let the degree of Sorrow that brought him to it, have been what it will.

* 2 Cor. VII. 10.

And where this is not done, no proportion of Sorrow is pleasing in his sight. Our Good is the thing he desires. He delights in the change of our Manners, and the correcting of our Wills; and no Affliction or Sadness of Heart can give pleasure to a Being so infinitely Kind as God, (who is Love and Goodness in its utmost Perfection) any farther, than those Dejections of mind contribute to our substantial Holiness, and thorough Reformation.

It is highly expedient indeed, that we should be most heartily concerned for having done amiss, because what we are truly sorry for we shall not easily be induced to repeat, or suffer our selves to be reconciled to any more. And such a Concern will be the natural result of a serious Reflection, how we dishonour God and our selves by a wicked Life; what Vengeance we have provoked, and what Mercies we have abused. But, since all our Indignation, and Shame, and Zeal, and Detestation of our former Offences, tends only to the hating and forsaking them effectually; the Sincerity of these depends upon the effect
they

they have upon our future Behaviour. And, as every sorrowful Man is not truly penitent, so many true penitents make no very great appearances of Sorrow. And it is not the Tears, or the Sighs, or the Melancholy Bewailings of our Misery, but the After-Acts of our Lives, from whence we must take the true measures and marks of Repen-
ance.

All other Testimonies are exceeding deceitful, and such as no man can with any good assurance depend upon. For, besides that nothing short of serious Amendment, the cleansing of the Hands, and purifying the Heart answers the design of our Contrition; there is so great a variety of Tempers among Men, that no sure Conclusion can be made from One Man to Another. Some are so tender and soft, that the slightest occasions suffice to melt them into tears: And Others so tough and impenetrable, that they can entertain the severest Accidents, without any appearance of Concern. Some again quickly compose and recover themselves, and when once their Grief hath gotten a vent, it is presently forgotten again; and they are the same gay
Persons

Persons, as if no Evil had happened to them. Others Affliction takes absolute possession of, no time will wear it off, No comforts will appease their troubled Spirits. So that no fixed proportion of Grief can be so accommodated, as to fit the Circumstances of such distant Constitutions. The Rule then in common to both sorts, is the efficacy of those Impressions: Which, whether their Violence, or their Continuance be more or less, is only then of equal force and value in Both, when Both are alike reformed by them, alike prevailed upon to commit no more those Follies, which have been the just cause of so much Disquiet to their Minds.

The Lamentations indeed of those famous Penitents in Scripture do much surpass the Usual Proportions of most Christian's Grief, so far as we are able to guess. And it was fit, that They who had given such instances of Humane Frailty, in falling so grievously, should be as remarkable Patterns of holy Indignation and Zeal, in acknowledging their Faults, and recovering themselves from them. This was highly commendable In them, and is thus far

far an instruction to Us, that We ought to afflict our selves with sad remembrances, in proportion to the Delight, and the Aggravations, with which we offended. But that is, because this After-punishment, inflicted by our own hands, will encrease our Hatred against Sin. A Hatred, that can never be too great; and therefore no Sorrow that contributes to it, can be too great neither, provided we find it necessary for the reclaiming us more perfectly, and that it do not drive us to Despair, or Distrust of God's Mercy, nor rob us of those sweet Comforts, pronounced to Holy Mourners, and which the Service of God, and a good Conscience, are designed to support, and cheer us with.

But of This great Care must be taken, and a prudent Temper used, like that practised by St. Paul, to the notorious offender at *Corinth*; Whom, though he had delivered to Satan for the Scandal of his Crime, yet upon his relenting he immediately restores,* *lest* *2 Cor. II. Satan (says he) *should take an advantage over it, and the Man be swallowed up with over-much sorrow.* From whence it is plain, both that there may be a dan-

dangerous excess given of Penitential Sorrow, and that so much of it as brings us to be duly sensible of our Sins, and diligent to avoid and make amends for them hereafter, is sufficient for our purpose, and pleases God very well. So that No Man need torment himself with a Scruple of not sorrowing for his Sins as he ought, provided he have but effectually subdued and reformed them. For we grieve only, that we may hate and forsake them; and therefore we ought to assure our selves, that God, who regards our Virtue, will accept it by what means soever it be wrought. That, if the Cure be made, it is the same thing, whether the Remedies that effected it, were Corrosives or Lenitives. And sure we ought rather to be thankful, that God had Compassion on our Infirmities, and spared us from absolute Dejection, and used his gentler methods of healing; since he measures our Repentance, not by the quantity of our Tears, or the bitterness of our Complaints, but by the Sincerity of our Hearts, and the amendment of our Lives, for the time to come.

And

And now, as to the *Falling short of some Vertues*, which was the *Last* of those Failings before-mentioned, from whence Men are used to doubt of their having True Faith; We ought not to be disquieted at This neither; except these be such Virtues, as are absolutely necessary for us to excel in, and our own endeavours be wanting to obtain them. Every Condition and Relation of humane Life brings its peculiar Duties and Obligations along with it. And Others, except those which are General, and Concern every Man in Order to Salvation, do not fall within the Compass of our present practice. But even of Those that do, we are no where promised, that we shall presently attain them, upon our designing to do so. God sees fit many times to leave a Lust unsubdued, and to withhold the Perfection of some Grace from us, thereby to keep us in Action, and to continue us Humble. Constant Success, in Spiritual as well as Temporal Affairs, is apt to blow us up with Pride, and make us not only Vain, but Idle and Careless too. And therefore, both our Modesty and our Dili-

Diligence stand in need of Difficulties, and Wants, and Disappointments to preserve them. So that the missing of One Virtue in this Case, often prevents the loss of Another. The Check of what we Desire, procures the Advance of somewhat more profitable for us. If *Knowledge* be deny'd us, because there is danger of its *puffing us up*, and *Charity*, which is more to Edification, be planted in its stead, it is a Blessed Exchange, and God hath only made a better choice for us. But besides, As God does not require all Virtues from Each man, so neither does he expect the same Degrees of the same Virtues from Every Man. In a Word; He will call no Man to Account for more than he was enabled to perform. If We do our parts, our Faith, and our Integrity shall be approved; and if we want not Honesty, and Endeavour, the want of Success shall never be imputed to us. It will not call our Salvation into hazard in the Day of Judgment, and therefore it should not disquiet us in the Day of Tryal.

And thus I have done with those Scruples, which are wont to rise from the

the Failings we feel or fancy in our
selves. Those that proceed from the
expectation of such easy and peaceful
Resentments of Mind, as are imagi-
ned always to attend Piety and true
Faith, shall be considered (God wil-
ling) in another Discourse.

C A S E

O F A

Weak and imperfect Faith.

The Scripture about it considered.

S E R-

See Mark IX. 24. I cannot but

believe, help thou my Un-

belief

~~I thought from the Words~~

was to treat of a Weak and

imperfect Faith and, in pur-

sue of this Design, I have already

align-

SERMON XIII.

THE C A S E OF A Weak and Imperfect *F A I T H*. *The Scruples about it consider'd.*

St. Mark IX. 24. Latter part.
*Lord I believe, help thou my Un-
belief.*

MY design from these Words,
was to treat of a Weak and
Imperfect Faith and, in pur-
suance of that Design, I have already
assign-

assigned some Reasons for the weakness of Faith, such, and so general, that all People will find themselves more or less concerned in them ; which was my First Head.

My *Second* proposed to satisfy the Scruples of many well-meaning Persons upon this occasion ; by shewing, that those things which are frequently suspected, as signs of their having no True Faith, are really not so. Now, These being of Two sorts, Some, that proceed from a sight or an imagination of some Failings in Men's own selves ; and Others, from the want of such easiness and peace of mind, as are supposed constantly to attend true Piety and Faith ; The Former of these Kinds have been already consider'd particularly, and the Latter come now under our Examination, *viz.* Those Dissatisfactions, which are apt to arise from the want of such easy and peaceful Resentments of Mind, as true Faith, and that Piety which God accepts, are always supposed to produce.

Now of These I commonly meet with Two, which seem most to deserve our Consideration, And they are,
D d *First,*

The Case of a Weak

First, Mens doubting of their particular Election and Salvation ; and Secondly, The want of those inward Joys, and that present constant peace of heart, which Religion is so often said in Scripture to cheer our Spirits with, and to recommend it self to us by.

First then, I shall endeavour to satisfy you, that for Men to doubt of their own particular Election and Salvation (as that Phrase is commonly used) is not any Argument, that they want true Faith. Nor indeed could it ever have been thought one, if a sort of Vain Men had not led their Followers away, with a strange deluding imagination, that it was One necessary part and Character of a true Belief in Christ, to perswade themselves of their own personal Election, and that it was impossible they should ever miscarry ; So that not to rest assured of their own Eternal Salvation, is, (as they represent the matter) a Distrust of Christ's mercy, and of the Faithfulness of God to his promises, since his gifts, and his calling are without Repentance, and whom he once loveth, he loveth them unto the end.

Now

Now when people are told in so very confident and peremptory terms, that This is the Faith, by which they must be saved, and, that to question their own Eternal Happiness, is an undeniable proof, that no such thing belongs to them ; And , when at the same time upon examination of their own breasts, and an humble sight of their many Failings and Infirmities, they cannot rest in all that fulness of assurance, but find some little Misgivings and Fears mixed with their Hopes ; We are not to wonder, if they lye under sad anxieties , and dissatisfactions, so long as they believe themselves wanting in a Condition , absolutely necessary to Salvation ; But Such is not this positive Assurance, whatever is pretended ; nor in truth can it be ; as I hope to convince you in few words, and, by so doing, most effectually to put an End to all those Scruples and Disquiets, that are owing merely to this false presumption of its being so, and, that there can be no true Faith without it.

To believe, that God out of a gracious design to save Mankind from

Dd 2

Hell

Hell and everlasting Destruction, sent his Son into the World to dye for them ; And, that All such as Believe and obey the Gospel, shall most certainly, by His merits, have their Obedience accepted, and their Souls made eternally happy ; This indeed is a true, and a necessary Belief ; And to question This, is to distrust and dishonour God ; It is to contradict his word, and to blaspheme his Truth. But for You, or Me in particular, to believe that We are of this happy number, This can never be required of us, as a positive Duty. Nor hath the Gospel enjoin'd it, any farther than, by the Testimony of our own Consciences, and the word of God, we find our selves within those General terms, by which the Gospel promises Salvation to Mankind at large. And you will, I think, agree, that, even in very Good men, it cannot be expected This should amount to a positive assurance, when you have considered the following Arguments.

As First, It is not possible, I conceive, to reconcile such an absolute assurance with Fear. And yet the Gospel plainly pro-

propounds this as a proper, and very powerful motive to a Christian's Obedience, For however that may have been run down, as a Spirit contrary to the Genius of the New Covenant, and the New Creature ; yet it is not plainer, that the Old Testament places the * beginning of Religious Wisdom in the Fear of the Lord, than it is, that the New attributes the very finishing and Excellence of it to the same Affection of mind ; and makes the very Mercies of God in Christ a foundation for it. For so St. Paul advises the *Corinthians*, (2 Ep. Chap. VII. v. 1.) *Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse our selves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.* Where, it is plain, he spoke not to Novices, or to such as were to make their first feeble Essays by the help of this, and then pass on to some Nobler Motive ; but he expects that they should complete their Duty, and become perfect by That. A Vertue so far from being inconsistent with Gospel-mercies, that they are exhorted to fear for that reason, because they had such gracious promises to depend up-

*Ps. cxi. 10.

*Phil. II.

12, 13.

* Phil. II.
12, 13.

on. The same Apostle commands his *Philippians*, * *to work out their Salvation with fear and trembling* ; that is, in an awe of God's Justice constantly upon their minds ; a constant Dread of his Vengeance, and from thence an Anxious Care to please him. And yet all this is not a Spirit of Bondage ; for That could not stand with having received the Spirit of Adoption ; as these *Philippians* had ; who are accordingly encouraged to this diligence in the next verse, from the consideration of God's Grace, whereby he works in men *both to will and to do, of his good pleasure*. Nor may we say, (as some fondly do) that the Love of God is cooled by such a principle, since our Blessed Saviour himself hath recommended the highest Act of Love, that men are capable of, no less than suffering Martyrdom it self, and laying down our lives for his sake, from the same motive, Thus he hath chosen to do to his beloved ones, (*Luke XII. 4. 5.*) *I say unto you my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the Body, and after that have no more that they can do ; But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear ; fear him, who after he hath killed,*
hath

hath power to cast into hell, yea I say unto you, fear him. How often are we called upon * *Take heed lest we* * Heb. III. *depart from God,* Not to be † *high-* 12. *minded, but to fear,* lest the branches † Rom. XI. 20. of the Olive be cut off, after they have been grafted in, and others be taken in their stead ; and to beware of temptation, lest he || *who thinketh he* || 1 Cor. X. 12. *standeth,* and trusts too much to his own bottom, *happen at last to fall.* Now if any Man can discern, how such a Fear as this can agree with a full and undoubted perswasion of ones own particular Election and Salvation, then he may allow every Misgiving of this kind to be a Want of Faith. But, if being afraid , and being certain of the self same thing, at the same time ; If trembling for fear we should miscarry and offend , and knowing that we cannot possibly miscarry ; If taking heed lest we fall, and yet being obliged to believe that God can as soon cease to stand as We ; If these things I say, be not Contradictions to all Experience and Common Sense, I must own I do not know any thing that is. And then it follows, that the Gospel, which commands such an awful dread

of God, and fear of our own Safety as we have seen ; cannot command such an assurance, as is inconsistent with that fear, and must needs destroy it. Consequently then those doubts, which prove the want of such an absolute assurance, do not prove, that the Person who labours under them, wants true Faith, or any qualification requisite for a Christian Life here, and Heaven hereafter.

Let it be considered, *Secondly*, That Such a positive Perswasion as This cannot be required as a necessary act of saving Faith, because the *Promises of Salvation are themselves Conditional, and one of those Conditions is Perseverance*. The marks, which St. John hath given to judge our State by, are such as these, * *He that hath this hope in himself, (that is, the hope of seeing God as he is, and enjoying his blessed presence for ever in Heaven) purifieth himself, even as he is pure.* † *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the Devil, He that doth not righteousness is not of God.* And the same Apostle declares in the *First* of that Epistle, that though he wrote to

* 1 John
III. 3.

† 1 John
III. 10.

to them on purpose that * *their joy* * 1 John
might be full, yet all the comfort he I. 4, 6.
 could give them was this, that if we
say we have fellowship with him, (i. e.)
with God the Father and the Lord Jesus
Christ, and walk in darkness, we lye,
and do not the truth. Our Life, we
 know, is a Condition of Discipline
 and Tryal; and what Difficulties and
 Temptations may still await us none
 of us all can tell. A good man may
 look back upon that part already spent
 with great Comfort, and a Holy Trust;
 But when the Best of Men look for-
 ward, all they can do, is only to hope
 well, and resolve well, for the time to
 come. And alas! How many of our
 most likely Hopes have been defeated?
 How many of the Purposes, which
 we made in the Sincerity of our hearts
 have been broken and baffled hereto-
 fore? And can we then be certain,
 where all we can do is to pray, and
 to intend, and to endeavour well;
 that is, to do again, what we have
 done perhaps a thousand times alrea-
 dy, without Success? If our Resolu-
 tions indeed be stedfast, if our good
 Intentions be accomplish'd, upon this
 Condition we are infallibly sure; But
 can

can we be infallibly sure of the Condition it self? Dare we depend upon our own hearts, which we have found treacherous so often before? and not doubt our frail nature, or remember our many infirmities? This sure, were strange Stupidity, strange Confidence, strange Forgetfulness. In a word, Undoubting assurance is only for Them that have finished their warfare, and come to receive their Crown. But in those who are still in heat of action, and have many sharp conflicts yet to undergo, many difficult Passes, and Ambushes to fight their way thro', it is too great a boldness, too great a folly, to sing Songs of Triumph to themselves, before the danger of the Day be over. It is encouragement enough to strive lawfully, that in God's due time we shall be sure ** to reap, if we faint not.* And if some fears of loosing the Prize, be mingled with our Hopes, these will but quicken our Care the more. But He that demands to have his Wages made over to him irrevocably, before his Services have given him a Title to them, is an Insolent Servant. He, it is to be suspected, does not ask a Security, to support

*Gal. VI. 9.

port him in the Hardships of his Duty, but rather to indulge Carelessness, and cherish Presumption.

But to silence all Scruples in one Word I observe, *Thirdly*, That such an assurance as we have been treating of, *not only is not*, but that it *cannot possibly be*, that *Necessary Christian Faith commanded in the Gospel*. For we are told, times without number, that *by Faith we are saved*, and consequently whatever Faith is, till we have it, we cannot be in a Condition of being saved. But now, if this Faith consist in a peremptory perswasion and full assurance of our own personal Salvation, then it follows, that we must believe, and be assured, that we are in a State of Salvation, before we are really so. Now this is manifestly absurd, and makes what such Men call *Faith*, to be in Effect no other than Ignorance, and Presumption. And, on the other hand, if a thing must actually be, before we can be assured that it is; then we must be in a State of Salvation before we can be assured that we are so; and consequently That Faith, which puts

us

The Case of a Weak

us into that State, cannot be a full and undoubted perswasion of our being in it already. And then, I am sure, there is no reason to disquiet our minds for any such Doubts or Misgivings, as proceed not from any distrust of God, but of our selves; such as fear always, because they always dread an angry justice, and the danger of offending a good and a Holy God. These Doubts may argue Modesty, and Humility, but are by no means to be lookt upon as a constant mark of Infidelity, or such a Defect in Faith, as should endanger our Souls, or give them any disturbance with regard to their Condition in the next World, merely upon this Account.

There remains yet One Objection more to be satisfied, which Men are apt sometimes to make against the reality of their own Faith; and This is derived from *the want of those inward Joys, and that present peace of heart, which a true Piety, such as God accepts, and approves, is supposed always to produce in the Breast of every sincere Believer.*

Among

Among the many Excellent Motives, whereby it hath pleased God to invite us to a good Life, None, which concern our present happiness, is more engaging, than that Tranquility of Mind, and those sweet Overflowings of Pleasure, which the sense of God's Favour, and the grateful remembrances of having done well, entertain Good Men withal. And, besides, the particular Ordinances of God to reward his Servants with these present Satisfactions, there is somewhat in the very nature of the thing, so agreeable, so constant a relish of Virtue, to soften the difficulties of it, that a man may well be tempted to suspect himself, when he reaps no sensible delight from his endeavours to act worthily. But yet sometimes so it happens, that this Joy is either withheld, or the sense of it intercepted, and yet no uncomfortable Conclusions, how colourable soever, can with certainty be gathered to our prejudice, and that particularly upon these following Accounts.

First, Though this pleasure of Mind, be a *Common*, and most *usual*, yet

yet it is not a *necessary* and *inseparable* Attendant upon well-doing. We find therefore St. Paul praying for the Romans, that God would fill them with all Joy and Peace in believing, which shews plainly, that these are Gifts and Graces, by which God encourages his Servants, and renders their Duty easy to them; But, had these been absolutely inherent in Faith, it had been a very vain thing to have prayed for them; for then they must have enjoyed those Blessings, from the moment of their embracing the Faith, and in proportion to their Zeal in assenting and living up to it. * And how odd had it been to beg, that They might have joy and peace in believing, when at this rate they could not possibly believe, but they must have Joy and Peace?

*Rom.XV.
13.

And therefore, when we see such things made the Subject of a Petition to God, we may be sure, they are not any necessary ingredient of Faith, but something additional and accidental to it, which may be withheld, or may be granted, at God's good pleasure; and without which the Virtue
itself

itself may subsist, and continue entire.

Secondly, These Comforts God sometimes does actually withhold, for our greater advantage. How frequent are the Complaints in Scripture of God's hiding his Face from his Servants? how vehement the Supplications for the light of his Countenance to shine out upon them? And this putting himself behind the Cloud, as it were, is by no means a constant effect of his Displeasure, but a necessary Discipline and Check upon them that are left in that dark disconsolate Condition. He knows how apt our Joys, even upon Spiritual Accounts, are to over-set us; how any inward Gaiety of heart swells and makes us giddy; And therefore these Dejections are of no less use to contain some in their Duty, than the contrary Comforts are to encourage and support Others. 'Tis the Wisdom and Goodness of his Providence, to keep the Sins of one Penitent, and the Image of an angry Justice before his Eyes, that a longer Remorse may effectually humble him, and prevent a Relapse; No less than it is

is, to sustain Others by the ravishing Ideas of his Mercy, that These may cheer the faint and feeble, and rescue them from Despair. He best knows our Tempers, and what Remedies and Diet are proper for the several sorts of them. Those, whose distresses require it, shall have *Angels Food* and *Meat enough*; Others, who are not to be trusted with such delicious fare, shall be fed with the *Bread of Affliction*, and have *plenteousness of Tears to drink*. And this severe dispensation, if rightly improved, so as to keep us low, and wean us from the World, and inflame our Zeal and Devotion to seek God's Face more earnestly, will at last break forth in marvellous Joy, and, like a Cloudy Morning, burst out into a warm and glorious Day. The Sun of Righteousness will not fail in his due time to shed his refreshing Beams upon our Head, and double the blessing, and recompence all the past long Night, by rising, not with comfort only, but which is more desirable, with *healing under his Wings*. For this *trial of our Faith worketh patience*, and if *patience have her perfect work*, then (St. James tells us, *Jam. I. 4.*) we shall

shall be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

But *Thirdly*, To speak my thoughts freely on this occasion, I am clearly of Opinion, that the most usual Cause of these Scruples is Melancholy, and a diseased Blood. When the Spirits are low and sluggish, and depress the mind, then every thing looks black, and dismal; and the distempers of the *outward* Man, are mistaken for the desertions of the *inward*. The Understanding is disturbed, and the Imagination so blotted and stained, that it makes a false *Medium*, and nothing appears in its true shape or colour. In this confusion Men are the most unqualified that can be, to make any judgment concerning the State of their own Souls. They cannot be brought to believe themselves such as they are, and they run away with strong notions of their being such as they are not. Examine what Ground they have for their lamentations, what grievous, wilful, and habitual Offences they can accuse themselves of, which should justify their Terrors, and provoke God to forsake them;

E e

yet

yet still, though their Consciences condemn them not, all comes to one, and lost they are sure they are: Though Others, who see their Condition without prejudice, and weigh it impartially, are assured both from Scripture and Reason, that it is not, cannot be so with them. So impossible is it sometimes for a Man to know himself, and so exceeding deaf does this unhappy Complexion render Men, not only to all Comfort, but to all manner of Reason and Argument. And, which is yet worse, Religion it self suffers by this means, and the Reputation of its Joys and secret Complacencies is severely reflected upon by the Ignorant; (though most unjustly) when We, who are Ministers of the Gospel, do not remove these dismal Agonies. Whereas, in truth, they are no part of Our Business, but require Physicians of another Kind: and that which commonly passes for Trouble of Mind, and a wounded Conscience, is no Malady of the Mind at all, nor capable of being cured by all the *Balm* in the *Spiritual Gilead*; but purely a Bodily Distemper, and only to be composed by Bodily Applications.

So

So that, *Fourthly*, For the Vindication of God's Truth, we must observe, That these Promises of inward Content and Satisfaction to Good Men, are to be understood, as all those other Promises of *Long Life*, and *Health*, and *Riches*, and *Prosperous Success*, and every Temporal Blessing: That is, So as to be true for the most part, and except some better thing be given in their stead: But not so universally true, as to admit of no extraordinary and reserved Cases; nor to oblige God never to send Trouble of Mind, or any other Afflictions, upon his best and most beloved Servants, when he sees this most expedient; Profitable for the Tryal and Increase of their Vertue and Patience, or any otherwise more for the Eternal Good of their Souls.

Thus it appears evidently, That, the Joy of Well-Doing does not always accompany the Action it self. Sometimes it is separated from it by God, who sends this Anguish and Tribulation of Spirit, and consults our Advantage by these unpleasant Methods; And sometimes an unhappy Constitution sheds its Venom upon the

Mind, and imbitters all its Reflections upon it self: But, however that be, since the Pleasures and charming Satisfactions of Holiness may be sometimes missing; And since these Ways there are, at least, of taking them from us, the Consequence is undeniable to my present Purpose, *viz.* That *those inward Disquiets ought not to drive us to any distrust of Mercy, or Despondency of our own Eternal Welfare. That Comfort and Safety do not always dwell together; and we argue wrong, if we make the Want of Peace and Joy in believing, a Proof of our not believing at all.*

III. And now at length I am come to my *Third and Last* Thing proposed from the Text, which is, *To lay down some Rules, whereby the Weakness of Faith may be distinguished from the Want of it; and, how any Man, by examining his own Conscience, may discern whether his imperfect Belief be consistent with the Terms of Salvation or not.*

The Necessity of having some such distinguishing Characters is very great, because what I have said upon the
Former

Former Particulars is only designed to prove, That the Imperfections of our Faith are not always our Faults, but now and then our Misfortunes. This was a Support due to the Integrity and honest Endeavours of some Melancholy good Persons. But, when I urge thus much on Their Behalf, my Meaning is not, to encourage Others in their Security, who ought to be dejected, and yet are not. Some Cases give Men unnecessary Trouble, and scare them with imaginary Dangers : Others carry just Fear in them, and open all Hell, to Men so stupid and blind, that that they cannot, or will not see it. So that it is of mighty Consequence, to open the Eyes of both Those sorts of Persons ; and to set each of their Circumstances in a true Light, that the One may be awakened from his frightful Dream, the Other from his pleasant deluding One ; The Sorrowful rejoice in the vanishing of his Sorrows, and the Sinner have no less Cause to do so, in the timely Sight of his Misery, and happy Care to prevent it.

This were a Work well deserving a larger and more particular treating, than I am now able to allow it ; but

The Case of a Weak

however, some few General Observations carefully applied, and compared with what hath been said on the Two former Heads, will be a sufficient Direction to us in this Affair.

First, Such Imperfections in our Faith are very agreeable with our Safety, *as we our selves have not voluntarily contributed to.* There is, as I said formerly, a Defect in Believing, which proceeds from the Mysterious Nature of the Doctrines propounded to us, and the Shortness of our Understandings, which are not large enough to comprehend them. And this is such a Defect, as Nature and not We are accountable for. But there is also Another, which Men make this only a Pretence for, and That is wholly their Own. For, though we are not able to conceiye every Article of the Christian Religion distinctly, and to render a Reason of every Nicety that captious Disputers may load it with; yet, unless there be some Unfair Dealing, of which we are Guilty to the blinding of our own Eyes, there is enough to be discovered for the Conviction of our Judgment, and bringing us into the Obedience of Faith.

Faith. Now indeed, if we first consult Flesh and Blood, and take a prejudice to Religion, because it bridges us of some Pleasures, and claps a severe Restraint upon some Appetites, and expects that Humane Discourse should submit to Divine Revelation; Upon These Terms, the Success of our Study in it is not like to be very great. But then the Disappointment is entirely from our selves. For, when Men thus possess pretend to examine, and give off dissatisfied, it is because their Minds are bribed and byassed against the Cause they undertake to judge. Almighty God does indeed declare Truths of a more elevated kind; but the Principles he requires us to proceed upon are the same: And he gives Men leave to use all Arguments, that they think reasonable in other Cases, provided they will but yield their Assent upon equal Terms. But if a Man resolve beforehand, not to allow, that God can be Wiser, or Greater than himself; if no Authority shall suffice to prove, that any thing above the reach of his own Reason ever came from Heaven, but all Mankind shall be esteemed Lyars, rather than that

Idol within his own Brain ; if he discern beforehand, what Engagements these Doctrines, when allowed, draw him into ; and cannot away with the Absurdity of a Practice contradicting his Profession ; and upon that Account will not enslave himself, nor tie up his own Hands ; This alters the Case extreamly ; These are not Difficulties of Nature's but our Own making. God will vindicate his Institution and his Truth, in severe Vengeance upon such perverse Wretches, and make a just Difference between those that doubt, because it is impossible for them to know perfectly ; and them that dispute and oppose, because they are loth to find the Truth ; slack to consider, and unwilling to believe.

Secondly, Another very distinguishing Character of this imperfect Faith, whether it be agreeable to the Terms of Salvation or not, is *the Humility, or the Pride of the Man's Heart*. For, where a Person is modest, and thinks meanly of himself, he will see, and bewail, and diligently endeavour to redress, the Grievances and Infirmities of his own Mind. His Ears will be open to Instruction and Reproof ; his Under-

Understanding will not disdain to captivate it self to the Wisdom of God, nor blaspheme and rally the Inspirations of the Holy Ghost, nor arraign all sober Christians of Credulity and Madness, for submitting to a Voice from Heaven, the Testimony of Miracles, and the united Consent of the Church in all Ages. He studies the Scriptures reverently ; confirms himself in what Reason may attain to, and what it cannot , he silently adores ; His Ignorance is not wilful and affected, but he is ever desirous of better Information ; and, in the mean while, submits quietly to the Determination of his Superiors, in disputed Points, rather than he will disturb the Peace and Order of the Church, for the sake of Contradiction, or the Itch of advancing any particular Conceit of his own. Such a Temper as This is highly necessary and commendable, where no Man can know every Point of Religion perfectly, and but very Few have Advantages of examining nicely all that may be known. Now an Humble Spirit makes the best amends for such Disabilities in Speculation ; And indeed, for all the Defects in Practice.

Because

Because it keeps Men sensible of their Diseases and Wants, and best qualified to receive a Cure for them. Whereas Pride, on the Contrary, not only makes Men Fools, but keeps them so. It fills them full of themselves alone, and never looks, but through the Magnifying part of the Perspective. It renders them deaf to all manner of Admonition, because it never suffers them to suppose they want any; And, instead of growing wiser and better, they are only exasperated, and hardened the more in their Folly. In short, take Faith in its utmost Latitude, and you will find, in every Instance, the same Event with that which our Saviour hath described in the Parable * of the Pharisee and the Publican. He that descends into his own Breast, and sadly reflects on his Unworthiness and Deficiencies; that laments, and condemns himself with a *God be merciful to me a Sinner*, or, as in the Text, cries out with Tears, *Lord help my Unbelief*, is likely enough to go down to his House justified. † *The Meek will God guide in Judgment, and the Humble will he teach his Way*. But when once a Man is come to a *God I thank*

* Luke 18.
9.

† Psal. 25.
9.

*thank thee, that I am not as Other Men are ; when he is blind to his Own Failings, and rips up those of Others, to shelter, and excuse his Own ; This Man's Unbelief is not through Weakness, but through Perverseness and Choice. He continues ignorant and wicked, because he will not learn ; And there is no Remedy, but continue so he must ; because he thinks himself too wise and too good to be taught, and admonished. His desperate Condition is well observed by Solomon, * See'st thou a Man wise (he might have said, holy too) in his own conceit, there is more hope of a Fool, or of a profligate Sinner, than of him. The One labours under a more raging and a more scandalous Distemper indeed ; but the Other is poison'd secretly, and so fond of his Disease, that he hates his Antidote, and obstructs all the Methods of Recovery.*

But *Thirdly*, The Weakness of Faith, and Defects in Practice are known to be consistent with Safety, or otherwise, *by the Use or the Neglect of proper Means to strengthen it.* For it is not enough, that we have not wilfully contributed to our past Failings

ings, nor yet that we lament or are seriously concerned for our *present*, unless to both these we add Vigilance and care, to prevent those that we are subject to, for the *future*. He that feels himself perplexed with Doubts and Difficulties in Religion, must *ask Wisdom of God*, and labour after it with Meekness and Diligence. He that finds his Faith weak in influencing his Practice, must take all Opportunities of fastening good Principles on his Mind; and continually quicken and rouse himself up by Holy Motions and Remembrances; and drive the Impressions deeper, that they may be ever present, and ever vigorous, to draw out into use, and ward off every Temptation that besets him. The Man that languishes in his Devotion, must raise and inflame his Zeal, by all necessary Preparations to Prayer; by sequestering himself from Business and Care, as much as Conveniently he may; fixing his Mind with Reverent Apprehensions of the Majesty he kneels before, and the infinite Importance of the Blessings he prays for. He that repents, and thinks his Regret for past Offences less afflicting than it ought, must

must work himself into as deep Remorie as possibly he can; And express his Sincerity and the Sense of his Soul, by sorrowing in Proportion for his Sin, as Nature determines him to do upon Other Occasions of Grief and Sadness: And so of the Rest of the Cases mentioned heretofore. For, tho' God make Allowances for Nature and unavoidable Infirmities; yet he expects we should not improve these into Wilful Transgressions and Habits of Vice. But on the contrary, that we withstand and strive against them; and proceed as far as we can, toward the correcting and curing of them. He does not expect, that every Man should be equally Knowing, or equally Considerate, or equally Devout, or Contrite; But he requires, that Every one should know as much as he can, and make his Belief as practical and effectual as he can, and Pray as fervently, and do Good as delightfully, and Mourn for his Wickedness as affectionately, as he is able. For, This is the only Mark of our Integrity, and that which will take off all the Mischief of corrupt Nature, not to make our Misfortunes a Pretence for real Faults,

Faults ; nor, from the necessary Imperfections to which we all are liable, to take occasion of Transgressing perversely, and covering our own Carelessness and wilful Neglects.

And to all these things we must add a *Fourth* Sign, which is, *Frequent and earnest Applications for Strength and Grace, to Him who is able to support and perfect us.* To our Lord therefore we should come ; And, if we be Sincere, we shall come (like Him in the Text) with strong Cries, and vehement Contention of Heart and Voice. We shall beg his Assistance against our Failings, and his Comforts against our Sorrows and sad Misgivings of Heart ; that he would protect us in our Dangers and Temptations, and give us a right Judgment of his Dealings with us ; that he would scatter our Doubts and Distractions ; and dispell those Clouds, which intercept the joyful Light of his Countenance from us. And in all these, and in all other Instances of a weak Faith, *Lord, we believe thou canst, and therefore we pray, that thou of thy Goodness wilt help our Unbelief ;* stablish, strengthen, settle

settle us in thy Truth : Yea, We beseech thee good Lord, that it may please thee to strengthen such as do stand, and to comfort and help the Weak-hearted, and to raise up them that fall, and finally to beat down Satan under our Feet. Amen.

S E R-

SERMON XV.
CHRIST'S RESIGNATION
TO HIS
Father's Will.

St. LUKE XXII. 42.

Father, If thou be Willing, remove this Cup from me; nevertheless, not My Will, but Thine be done.

THE several Circumstances of our Blessed Saviour's Passion are related by the Evangelists, in so particular, so moving a Manner, as must needs argue those
Men

Men extremely stupid and insensible, upon whom they do not make a very lively and vigorous Impression. Now the Purposes this Account is design'd to serve, are principally these Two ; To excite our Thankfulness and Love, to Him who submitted to undergo such bitter things for us ; And to work us up to an irreconcilable Aversion against Sin, the wretched Cause of all his Sufferings. And , What can kindle our Love, and enflame our Hearts with Zeal and Gratitude, if the Contemplation of his Agonies and Pains, the Tortures of his Body, and the Amazement, and exceeding Sorrows of his Soul will not, to which he voluntarily exposed himself, by accepting the Punishment of our Offences ? What can present us with a more frightful Image of the Wrath of God, and the Horrors of a self-condemning Conscience, than those Sweats of Blood, that Heaviness even unto Death, which this Tragical Scene in the Garden sets before our Eyes ? How shall wicked Sinners bear the Fury of an incensed God, smoking in Vengeance against them, when the Heat of it was so violent against his own

F f most

most innocent and dearly beloved Son, sustaining the Representation only, of Sinners, but who himself had never done any Sin? How exquisite must be the Amazement, how darting and raging the Pangs of Offences unpardoned; when He, whose Mind had nothing to reproach him with, trembled and sunk under the Apprehensions of that Wrath, which Others had provoked? How insupportable must be that Load of Terror and Anguish? How dire and dismal that Oppression of Spirit, which wicked Men draw down upon their own Heads; when He, who in Kindness took the Burden, which himself had in no degree deserved, yet was almost crushed with the mighty Weight; and with most vehement Importunity desired, if it were possible, a Release from the approaching Misery? For so he manifestly does, in those Words now propounded to your Consideration. He withdrew from his Disciples, he poured out his Soul to God, he shewed him of his Terror and Trouble, and kneeling down, with all possible Submission, with the utmost Earnestness humane Nature was capable of, with
all

all that even this present, this unparalleled Affliction could inspire, he prayed, saying, *Father, if thou be Willing, remove this Cup from me; nevertheless, not My Will, but Thine be done.*

In speaking to this Text, I am not very solicitous to compare and reconcile it with those differing Forms of Expression, which the other Gospels have given us in this Matter. All that is necessary of that Kind, will fall in occasionally, under some or other Head of my Discourse. And That can be but little, since the Substance of this Prayer is the same, in all the Evangelists. And any of the Terms, they have left it us in, will be equally serviceable to the Use I intend to make of it.

Now that is Two-fold :

I. *First*, I shall lay before you some Considerations relating to the Prayer it self, and the Circumstances of our Blessed Lord, who made it.

II. *Secondly*, I shall observe something from hence, which may be applicable and useful to the Case of Christians in general.

I. I begin with some Considerations, relating to the Prayer it self, and the Circumstances of our blessed Master which put him upon it. And I think there are Four, which may very well deserve our Notice.

1. *First*, The Compellation, or Manner of Address, in that first Word, *Father*.

2. *Secondly*, The Subject Matter of his Petition, *Remove this Cup from me*.

3. *Thirdly*, The Reservation, with which that request is preferred. *If thou be willing, &c.*

4. *Fourthly*, The free and entire Resignation of himself to God's Disposal, in case his Wisdom should see fit not to grant this Request; *Nevertheless, not My Will, but Thine be done*.

† Matth.

26. 39.

* Mark 14.

36.

1. *First*, Here is the Compellation, or Manner of Address, *Father*; *O my Father*, as † St. Matthew; *Abba, Father*, * St. Mark; Which Exclamation in the One, and the Doubling of the Word in the Other, add nothing to St. Luke's Sense; but only import the Vehemence and Affectionate Application of the Speaker. In our

Lord's

Lord's last dying Agonies upon the Cross, we find him calling for Help under another Title; * *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* A Title denoting the unbounded Power of God; and proper for such Extremity of Sufferings, as nothing less than Omnipotence could be a sufficient Succour for. But here, before Matters were come to that Extremity, and, when the Design of his Supplication was rather for Prevention of an approaching Calamity, than for a rescue out of Miseries, which had almost overwhelm'd and swallow'd him up, the Character of *Father* is made choice of, as more agreeable to his Purpose. For This implied the Duty of a Son, and that ready Obedience, of which he was now about to give the last, the most convincing, the best becoming Proof. This argued the Tenderneſs of that Relation; Those Bowels, so apt to relent in all the Sufferings of Them, who derive their Nature and Being from us, and are a part of our own Flesh and Substance. That entire Affection, which even the Brutishest of Men cannot but feel, and the Best of Men find greater than can

* Matth.
27. 46.

be exprest. Much therefore need not be said to incline a *Father's* Pity, who in himself is so disposed to compassionate the Afflictions of a good Child, that it can hardly be imagined, he should lay more upon such a one, than is absolutely necessary to be endur'd; Or, that even Thus much should be imposed, without wise and forcible Reasons, and great degrees of Reluctancy, and a Violence upon himself. To all which if we add, that the tenderest Resentments of Earthly Parents are but a very feeble Image of the Love this Eternal Father bears to this Only, this Eternal Son; there needs no more to satisfy us, how significant this Endearing Term was in our Saviour's Circumstances; and that, if Any Consideration could, this of God's being his *Father*, (such a Father of such a Son) must have prevailed, for the obtaining his Petition. And what that was I come now to consider.

2. *Secondly*, As it is contained in that Clause, *Remove this Cup*, or (as another Evangelist hath it) * *Let this Cup pass from me*.

* Matth.
26. 39.

I cannot think there is any Occasion to spend Time, either in explaining this Metaphor, or enlarging upon the Reason of it. Scarce any Figure is more frequent in Scripture-Language, than that of a Man's *Cup* being put for his Portion, either of Prosperity, or Adversity. To this Purpose we read of God's being the Good Man's * *Cup*, and making *his Cup to* * Psal. 16,
overflow, when the Blessings and Com- 6. and 23.
 forts of Piety and Vertue are descri- 5.
 bed. And so likewise of a || *Cup of* || Psal. 75.9.
Trembling and Astonishment, of *Red Wine* and *Bitter Dregs*; when Misery and severe Vengeance are denounced against bold and impenitent Sinners, whom God hath marked out for exemplary Punishment, or utter Destruction. As little Reason is there to vindicate this Passage, from that very foreign and strained Interpretation, which Some have endeavoured to put upon it; As if Christ here did deprecate, not any Calamity that threatned his own Person, but such sore Tryals as his Servants and suffering Members might afterwards be exposed to, for the sake of God and their Duty. For, setting aside other Arguments, our

* John 18.
11.

Lord's own Words are a sufficient Guide to us in this Matter. He, when rebuking St. Peter's forward Zeal to rescue him from those Officers, who came to apprehend him, does it in these Terms, * *Put up thy Sword into the Sheath, the Cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?* Now what Cup could it be, that St. Peter endeavoured to prevent his Master's drinking, but those Sufferings, and that Death, which the *Jews* intended to bring upon him? And therefore we have all the Reason in the World to believe, that the same Sufferings and Death are meant by *the Cup*, he begs his Father to remove in the Text; Which yet, upon mature Conviction, that his Father did not think fit to remove, he settles himself presently afterwards to drink, with full Resolution and Contentment. The Only Argument, which prevailed with some Interpreters to seek out any other Construction for these Words, seems to have been an Imagination, that the betraying any degree of Fear or Unwillingness to dye in that cruel and ignominious Manner, was a Weakness unworthy of our Blessed Saviour, and incon-

inconsistent with his Design of coming into the World. The Force of which Pretence I shall be led to examine under my Next Particular. In the mean while, taking it for granted, that his approaching Passion and Death are the Calamities, which he begs here to be delivered from ; I proceed to observe in the

3. *Third Place, With what Reservation, he prefers this Petition to his Father, exprest in those Words, If thou be willing ; Father, if thou be willing, remove this Cup from me : Or, as it is in St. Matthew, * O my Father, if it be possible, let this Cup pass from me.* * Ch. 26. 39.

By comparing which Two Passages together, we are led to a right Understanding, what sort of Possibility is there intended. For, absolutely speaking, *all things are possible with God*, and it would ill become Us peremptorily to pronounce, that God could not remit the Sins of the World, without requiring a Satisfaction, and Equivalent Compensation for them, by the inestimable Blood of his own Innocent and Divine Son. But yet, even this Assertion is capable of a very fair and true Sense. For, although God,
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considered as a Sovereign and Almighty Being, can do all things which do not imply a Contradiction ; And, although Mercy be the undoubted Prerogative of a Supreme Law-giver, and may be extended to Whom, and upon what Terms, he shall think fit ; Yet, if we consider God, as a Wise and a Good Governor, One who is concern'd for the Honour and Observance of his Laws ; and who, in the Mysteries Work of Man's Redemption, did principally design to discourage Sin and Disobedience, and to promote Holiness, and the vigorous Love and Practice of Virtue in the World ; Thus it is very easy to discern, that, when he had once fixed these Rules and Measures to himself, it was not possible (according to that Scheme of Things) for this *Cup* to pass away from our Blessed Redeemer. The Reason is, because it is not possible for God, not to make choice of the Best Means, and such as may most conduce to the Wisest Purposes ; Such as are most Excellent in themselves, and may be most Worthy of a Just and Good Governor. Now no Man can suppose, that Sin would have been so effectually discouraged,

raged, if the Guilt of it had been released without any Consideration at all ; as it is now, by so severe and Exemplary a Vengeance, taken upon it in the Person of our common Representative and Proxy, *Christ Jesus*. God had not then so manifestly declared his Hatred and Resentment against all manner of Ungodliness and Unrighteousness of Men ; as now he hath, by so terribly afflicting even his own Son, when he vouchsafed to stand in the Place, and sustain the Person, of Sinners : He had not instructed us so fully in the Value of our Souls, had he not shewed us by this astonishing Instance, how precious a Ransom he thought them worth purchasing at : Nor had he bound us to the Love of Him, and that Grateful Obedience, to which all are now even * *constrained*,^{* 2 Cor. 5. 14.} who consider the unspeakable Kindness of their God and Saviour ; had he saved us with that which cost him nothing ; had we wanted that most sensible, that most powerful Engagement of not † *sparing* his own Beloved and only Begotten Son, but *giving him up for us all*.^{† Rom. 8. 32.} For This hath left us utterly inexcusable, if we do
not

not *live to Him*, who did not grudge to *dye for us*.

Since therefore God intended to beget in Men a due Sense, how exceeding offensive Sin was to him, and to work them up to a just Dread of the Punishment due for it ; Since the Reformation of Manners, and the Love of Him and Goodness, were the Effects aimed at in this Dispensation ; Since the maintaining his Laws in just Reverence and Authority, was a Design necessary, and becoming a Just and Holy Governor ; And since Infinite Wisdom must needs carry on these Purposes, by Methods most suitable and congruous to them ; It follows from hence, that, in some sense we may truly affirm, there was no Possibility of Christ's being excused from suffering for Sinners. *That is*, Though, in the Nature of the Thing, and with regard to God's absolute Sovereignty and Dominion, it was possible to have had the Sins of Mankind forgiven freely, and without any Atonement ; yet with regard to the End and Measures, which the Wisdom of God, as a Governor of the World, and a Law-giver to Men, had set to himself ; we have

have Reason to think, it was not possible. Because those Ends, so far as can appear to Us, could not have been served so well any other way. So that, whethersoever of the Two Phrases we take in this Prayer, *If it be possible*, or, *If thou be willing*, the Sense comes all to one. And by imploring, that this Cup might be taken away, *if it were possible*, our Saviour means such a Possibility as is Conditional, and depends upon the Will and Wisdom of God. And since the Determinations of the Divine Will are not like those of Ours, taken up in Humour, or Passion, or Partial Respects, but constantly the Result of mature, and steady, and unerring Wisdom: Therefore the Importance of our Saviour's Request, does, in Effect, come to thus much: That, if God saw any other Method of bringing about this great Work, which might be of equal Efficacy, with that of his enduring those bitter Things, which were now approaching towards him; he would, in tenderness to His own Son, make use of That rather; and spare him all that Agony and Torture, that Shame and Cruelty, All the

the intolerable, the unconceivable Anguish of Body and Mind, which, by his condescending to bear the Burden of his Father's Wrath due to sinful Men, was even then already let loose, and begun to be executed upon him.

Now here it will be seasonable to observe the true Reason of our Blessed Lord's addressing to his Father, as we see he does upon this Occasion. For it may be objected, ' Was it possible, ' that our Saviour should be ignorant ' what God had decreed to be done in ' this Matter? Does he not declare, ' that for * *that Cause he came to that* ' *Hour*, that he might glorify his Fa- ' ther by suffering? Did he not in a ' very solemn and severe Manner re- ' prove St. Peter, for supposing, that ' those Sufferings should not happen ' to him? Are not the Merits of those ' Sufferings to be measured by the ' Constancy and Chearfulness, with ' which they were undergone? And, ' since we have undoubted Testimo- ' nies of several Martyrs, who even re- ' joiced in their Tortures, does not ' this shrinking back, and these earnest ' Desires of escaping them, argue in ' Christ a greater Irresolution and
Weakness

* John 12.
27.

Weakness of Mind, than even some of his Servants discovered, in the Confirmation of that Truth, which they gladly Sealed with their Blood ? He took upon him our Flesh, and, in marvelous Condescension, came into the World, on purpose that he might dye for Our Benefit, and in Our stead ; And is his Love now so abated, and his Resolution so wavering, that, when it comes to the Point, he should decline Death ; and, by praying to be excused from it, defeat the very end of his being made Mortal ? These are Difficulties, which, with some colour of Argument, may be started from the Behaviour of our Lord in his Agonies, and the Request made here to his Father ; And fit it is, that they should be removed, and this Action set in its true Light ; which, if I mistake not, will effectually be done, by attending carefully to these following Particulars.

I. *First*, In regard our Blessed Saviour had the Divine and Humane Nature both united in One Person ; great Caution must be used in observing his Actions, that we do not mistake, in appropriating any of them
to

to that Principle, to which they do not properly belong. For, as those Works of *Wonder*, which exceeded or controuled all Powers of Created Nature, must be attributed to a Principle Omnipotent and Divine ; So in those Others, which relate to Subjection and Suffering, he must be understood to proceed upon a Principle purely Humane. Now praying to a Superior Being, is a Mark of Dependance and Subjection ; And undergoing Pain and Death, implies Suffering : Neither of which, God, as such, is capable of. And therefore, if the Person, who was God and Man both, did Either of these ; it is plain, he could do them but in One of those Capacities. The Faculties of the Divine Nature were totally suspended upon such Occasions, and He proceeded in them, not in any Degree as *God*, but entirely as a mere and real *Man*.

2. *Secondly*, The Efficacy and Mystery of Man's Redemption consisting in this Union, it was necessary, that there should be clear and undoubted Demonstration given, of the Reality of both these Natures in Christ. And this

this had not been done, unless, as our Lord's Miracles evidenced him to be Very God, so all the essential and inseparable Properties and Affections of our Nature had so manifestly appeared in him, as to leave no just Suspicion behind, whether he was Very Man. And, since the distinguishing Marks of this Nature lye principally in the Soul; it follows from thence, that sufficient Proof of our Saviour's perfect Humanity could not be given, either by his Death, or by any Bodily Sufferings; except his Mind were besides so affected with These, as might convince the World, that he bore an exact Resemblance to us, in all the Natural Passions and Inclinations of our Souls.

3. Now, *Thirdly*, In this Soul of Ours it is easy to observe a Two-fold Principle, which we call *Reason* and *Sense*. And, without entangling our selves in the Subtleties of Philosophers or Schoolmen about this Matter, Experience, (which is of more Weight than Ten thousand nice Distinctions) and a little serious Reflection upon our Selves, will plainly convince us, that we entertain different sorts of No-

G g tions,

tions, take different Measures, and aim at different Ends, as we are moved by the One, or other of these Principles. That, which we call *Sense*, catches greedily at the Present, pursues Ease, and Pleasure, and Safety; and consults the Preservation and Advantage of the Body. The Other, which we call *Reason*, enlarges our Prospect; takes into Consideration distant and future Objects; and persuades the foregoing some present Satisfactions, running some Hazards, enduring some Difficulties and Pains, for the Discharge of our Duty, and in Expectation of some greater Good in Reversion, which will make us ample amends for what we now lose or undergo upon its Account. The Former is the Principle of Animals; the Latter of Men and Christians. Under That are comprehended all our Natural Passions, which are the secret Springs that move us in all we do; under This are Understanding and Judgment, which direct, and regulate, and bound, and over-rule those Passions. But still Both these are Constituent Parts of the Humane Soul: And, to suppose a Man void
of

of Passions, or in no degree influenced by them, is as absolute a *Chimera* and Contradiction in Nature, as to suppose him without Reason. For These Two Principles are as necessary to make One perfect Soul, as the Rational Soul and Humane Body are to make One perfect Man. From whence we may argue,

4. *Fourthly*, That, The Weakness or Corruption of our Nature, as it stands now depraved with Sin and Lust, does not consist in being very tenderly and sensibly touched with Fear of *present Evil*, or strong Inclinations to *present Good*, ; but in permitting those Fears and Desires to prevail, and take place, against the Dictates of Reason and Duty. Aversion to Pain, and Death, and the like, are Affections interwoven with our Original Frame and Constitution. *Adam* felt them in the State of Innocency. Otherwise, it had been vain to threaten his Transgression with Death. For every Threatning of Punishment denounces something terrible, such as the Person is supposed to be under dreadful Apprehensions of, and will think himself concerned to avoid.

And therefore it is no just Reflection upon the *Second Adam*, that He too felt the same Aversion to Dying, and Torment, and Shame. Infirmities indeed these Aversions may be called, in Comparison of those Perfections, which belong to God and unbodied Spirits. But then they are such Infirmities, as All who partake of Bodies must have; And, if these things had been perfectly indifferent to our Blessed Saviour, he could not have been our Saviour; that is, he could not have been a True Man.

This is, what I think, a just and faithful Account of the Matter; Much to be preferred before that Resolution, which some have given of it, as if the Vehemence of our Saviour's Passion had made him forget himself, and utter things in the Heat and Transport of his Mind, which he presently checkt and corrected upon better Recollection. We indeed too often do so, but he never ceased to be Master of himself; and it seems too great a Dishonour to represent him thus rash and inconsiderate, which are the Effects of Corrupt Nature; though he thought it none to be like us, in all the inseparable

able Frailties of our Original and real Nature.

5. Now *Fifthly*, If Christ, as Man, could not be altogether indifferent, and unconcerned, at these severe Tryals, which he already felt in part, and saw coming upon him with great Violence; Then sure it could not misbecome him to use all possible Means for declining them, and consequently not to express his Concern, by praying against them, with such Reserves and Limitations, as he does here in the Text. It was no disparagement of his Love to Mankind, to detest Death and Sufferings; but in truth a higher Commendation of it; That, notwithstanding so quick a Sense, and so passionate a Regret, he offered himself to Sufferings, so ungrateful to Humane Nature in general, so exceeding harsh and bitter to Him in particular. It enhanced the Vertue of his Obedience, that he was content to give Proof of it, in so very tender and trying an Instance; and, the more vehemently he wish'd for a Release, the more Meritorious was his Submission. For God does not expect, that Men should have no unwillingness at all, to do, or to

suffer what he appoints for them ; but that they should conquer their Unwillingness, and bring themselves so to acquiesce in His Choice, as to make it their Own. St. Paul hath truly observed, * that *no suffering for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous* ; And therefore Suffering is never chosen for its own sake, but upon some other Consideration, which may over-balance the Grievousness of it. Were it Eligible in it self, there could be no Vertue in Choosing it : For the Vertue consists in conquering and denying our selves ; that we may please God. And, the stronger our own Aversions are, the more we renounce our own Wills, and the more acceptable is our Compliance with the Divine Will. All Which may give us a worthy Notion of the

4. *Fourth* and Last Thing remarkable in this Prayer, Namely, *Our Lord's free and entire Resignation of himself to his Father's Disposal, in case his Wisdom should see fit not to grant this Request.* And that is contained in the last Clause of the Verse, *Nevertheless, not My Will, but Thine be done.* And here again

again we are assaulted with another Objection, concerning the Contrariety of Christ's *Humane Will*, by which he declined Sufferings and Death, to his *Divine Will*, which was the same with his Father's, and both accepted and decreed those Sufferings. And This, if admitted, would destroy our Saviour's Innocence, and argue him guilty of Sin. Since the very Essence and Guilt of Sin consists in a setting up our own Will, in Opposition to the Will of God concerning us. Now, though it be true, that the Blessed *Jesus*, as partaking of Two Natures, had Two distinct Wills, proper to each of them; yet is it not by any means to be allowed, that Either of These were contrary to the Other. A Diversity of Inclinations indeed there was in Him, according to the different Motions and Tendencies of the Sensitive and Rational Appetite; and This, as was explained before, is no more than Every Man feels in himself; Such particularly, as we exercise in all those, which are called *Mixt Actions*. When a Man submits to take an unpalatable Medicine, in order to his Recovery from Sickness; or cuts off a

Limb to prevent a Mortification ; Nature starts back , and would be gladly excused from such severe Methods . But , when all Circumstances are laid together , and we come to be thoroughly convinced of the Benefit and Necessity of such Applications , we then prevail upon our selves to comply with them , and the *Rational* overcomes the *Sensitive* Principle in us . Now all this is the Act of One and the Same Will , moved by different Respects ; and determined at last , by That , which , upon the whole Matter , appears the rather to be chosen ; tho' at the Expence of some Difficulty and Trouble to us . Thus our Blessed Saviour , according to the Natural Principle of *Sense* , desired a Deliverance from his approaching Pains ; but according to the Principle of *Reason* , which was equally natural to him as Man , he accepted those Pains , and conformed his Humane to the Divine Will . But That , which clears him from all Repugnance to the Will of his Father , is , that he proceeded upon different Motives ; The Natural Aversion to Suffering disposed him to avoid it ; but the Sense of his Duty ,
and

and the Prospect how Necessary and Beneficial that Suffering would be, made him entirely satisfied with it, and got the better of that Aversion. And consequently, though there was in this Action a Diversity, yet is there no Contrariety of Wills; because these Dispositions to suffer, and not to suffer, did not proceed from the same Principle, nor were opposed in the same Respect.

The Schools have a Distinction, which may perhaps help to illustrate this Matter yet a little more fully. They tell us of a *General* and of a *Definite* or *Determinate* Will of God. All our Natural Inclinations and Aversions of what Kind soever, are agreeable to the *General* Will of God. For he endued us with them, and ordered all those Motions, by which we feel our selves affected from them. But now the *Determinate* Will of God hath imposed upon us certain Laws, and Conditions, and Restraints; against, and beyond which those Inclinations must not be indulged in some particular Cases. Now from hence it follows, that None of our Natural Inclinations and Aversions are offensive

five to God, or contrary to his Will, *generally speaking*, and *in their own Nature*; And that they are so Then only, when we suffer them to take Place, against his *particular* Will; which hath confined them, within some certain Rules, and upon special Emergencies. From hence it follows again; *That*, even in such Reserved Cases, These Motions are not sinful, provided we take Care to keep them within due Bounds, and in a constant Subordination to Reason and God's Commands. For the Design of Almighty God is not to extinguish our Natural Appetites, and make us cease to be Men; but to reduce those Appetites to Obedience, and so make us Good Men. And this is done effectually, when Sense is subjected to Reason, and both our Sensitive and Rational Mind are subject to the Appointments of God; notwithstanding all the Byass of Infirm Nature, which draws so strongly the other Way. And consequently the Blessed *Jesus*, in the Words now before us, did not correct any thing amisse in the former part of his Prayer. Nor was that Request of having this bitter Cup removed from him,

him, the Effect of Rashness or unthinking Passion ; But it had all the Perfection requisite for his own unblemish'd Innocence, and for a Pattern to all his Followers, under any sort of Difficulties and Tryals : Because it was tempered with that no less essential Branch of the same Prayer ; and this last Resolution makes one most uniform Act of the same Humane Choice, *Nevertheless, not My Will, but Thine be done.*

II. I now pass to the *Second* Thing propounded from my Text, and shall raise from hence some Observations for our Practice. But these are so Plain and Obvious, that, after what hath been said, I cannot ; And indeed, if what hath been said be duly attended to, I need not, do any more, than just to mention them.

I. *First*, From our Saviour's using that Title of *Father*, in the extream Anguish and Bitterness of his Soul, We may be admonished, *what Thoughts it will become us to entertain of God, in the Time of Distress and sore Affliction.* That these Things ought not to discourage

courage us in our Duty, or abate our Love of God ; or tempt us to suspect, that he hath laid aside all Care and Tenderness for Us. 'Tis true, Adversity is very often a Scourge for Faults ; and We, who have all of us been disobedient Children, and have deserved to be chastized, ought constantly to make our Amendment One happy Fruit of it. But This is not so strictly and universally true, that the Proportion of any Man's Wickedness, or the Place he holds in God's Favour, should be measured by the Quality or the Degree of his Sufferings. *Jesus the Blessed, was the Lamb of God, without Blemish and without Spot, He never did Sin, neither was Guilt found in his Mouth, and yet never was there any Sorrow like unto His Sorrow. He was the best Beloved Son of God, in whom his Soul delighted and was well pleased ; and never did he delight more in Him, than at that very Instant, when he Sweat Drops of Blood, and poured out his Life in inexpressible Agonies upon the Cross. This Example then ought to comfort and sustain us under our heaviest Pressures ; by an Assurance, that, how severely*

verely soever we may seem to be dealt with, yet the Weight of our Burden is no Argument that God hath cast us out of his Care and Protection ; that our Sorrows are capable of becoming fresh and greater Endearments, and that even in the midst of his Correction he does not cease to retain for his suffering Children, the Bowels of a most tender and affectionate Father.

2. *Secondly*, We are likewise taught by this Example, in *what manner we ought to address to this Father for Relief*. That it is no Offence, to wish and pray for a Deliverance from those Troubles, which it cannot be easy for Flesh and Blood to undergo. He that made us, considers How, and Whereof we are made ; and he does not expect that we should attain to such an Indifference, as our present Condition is not capable of. He allows us to decline Suffering by all Prudent and Lawful Methods ; He does not require that we should be insensible of Afflictions, when they come thick and heavy upon us. But even this tender Sense we have of them he commands us so to moderate, as to leave both the Measure,

Measure, and the Continuance of our Tryals to his Disposal. We may shew him freely of our Trouble; We may complain of the Uneasiness we feel; We may propose our Wants and our Wishes; But, though we may, and shall do well to Propose them, we must not presume to Prescribe to Him. When we have exprest our own Desires, we must rest our selves upon the Wisdom and Goodness of this Father, not doubting, but he knows better what is fit for us, than we do how to choose for our selves; And that what he knows best, his Paternal Care and Prudent Affection will not fail to order, for all those Children who maintain that Deference due to His Character and Theirs; and persist in their Obedience, and quiet Submission to whatever he sees convenient to appoint for them.

3. *Thirdly*, This Passage shews, *what sort of Submission God requires from us, to all the severer Dispensations of Providence.* And That is a Conforming Our Will to His. Not merely enduring what we cannot avoid, for this is a Submission of Rebels and
Slaves,

Slaves, of Brutes and Wild Beasts, when tyed and chained down to what they cannot run away from. We are not able to contend with God, or break loose from That, which must be endured, whether we will or no. But we must even be Willing to endure, and not have so much as the Disposition to resist. When we are satisfied that He hath determined any thing concerning us, We must prefer those Determinations before our own Desires, and make His Choice our Own. Assuring our selves, that This is best for us, and making our Wills stoop and bend to God's. And This cannot be unreasonable, when we reflect that his Proceedings are always agreeable to Equity, and Justice, and perfect Wisdom; that all His Intentions are full of Kindness; and that every Event will at last turn to our Advantage, if our selves do not obstruct the Design and good Effect of it. And, though in particular Cases, it may not be easy to discern This, or bring our selves to so resigned a Temper; yet possible it is, with the Assistance of his Grace, and strictly agreeable to that general Desire of having all things *work together for our Good*. A Good, which we never pursue so Regularly, so Effectually, as when we yield our selves up entirely to God's Disposal; and beg that not *Our Will*, but *His may be done*.

4. *Lastly*, From hence we are directed how to judge of the Success of our Prayers. That they are not always lost and disappointed

pointed, when the particular thing we ask is not granted ; but often answered in the most beneficial Manner, when we apprehend them to be denied and utterly rejected. This Son of his Love never prayed in vain, and though his bitter Cup was not removed, yet he had an Angel sent to strengthen him, and the Fruit of his Sufferings is endless and unspeakable. And We, in like manner, must reckon our Petitions well received, and happily returned to us ; Not only when we are rescued from our Troubles, but when we are supported *under* them, and rewarded *for* them. In such Cases God chooses better for us, than we should have done ; And, however a Release might be more grateful, and sute with our present Inclinations ; yet his Methods turn to greater Account. He afflicts because it is good for us to be afflicted ; and refuses only such things, as it would be unkind in him to give. And therefore, All we have to do, is to refer our selves and all our Affairs to Him ; and to beg that he would * *so assist us in all our Supplications and Prayers, that we may ever be disposed to the Attainment of everlasting Salvation, and among all the Changes and Chances of this Mortal Life, may be defended by his most gracious and ready Help, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

* Commu.
Service.

F I N I S.



